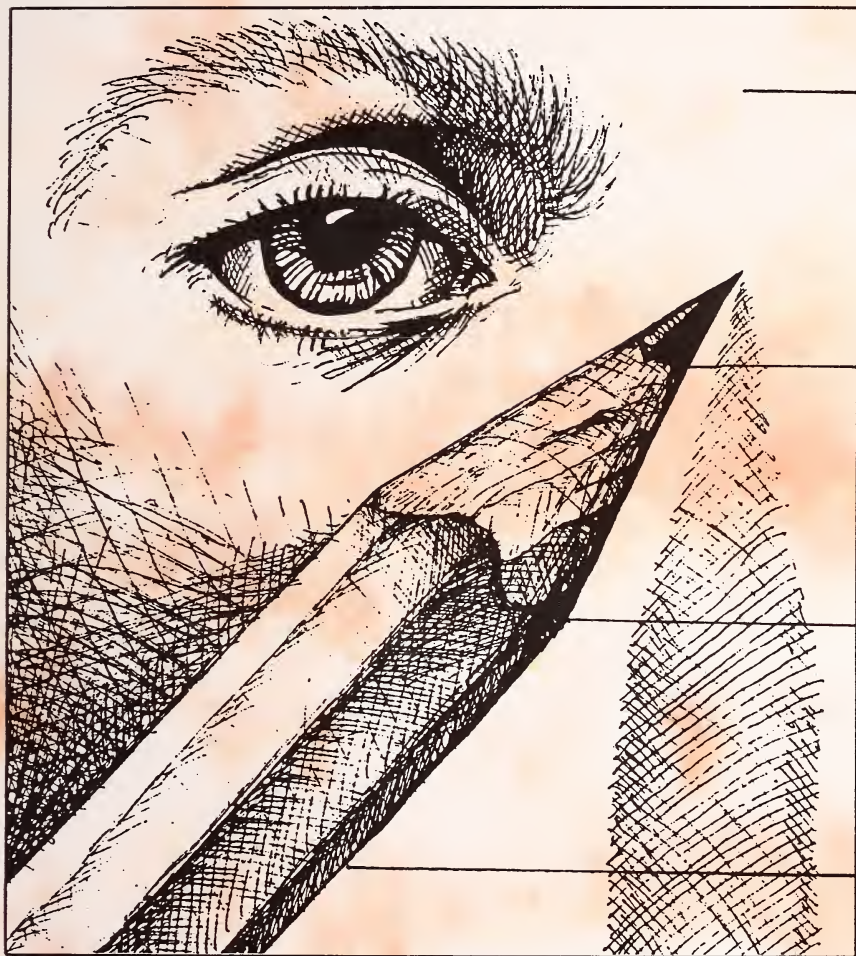


Microcosm



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Microcosm, an annual publication by Copiah Lincoln Community College, Wesson, Mississippi, contains the writings of both Co-Lin students and selected local high school students.

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A Contemporary View of the Thoughts and Feelings Behind Hawthorne's Giovanni

Dasha Allred

Eddie Vedder, the lead vocalist for the new generation, alternative band, Pearl Jam, ends the group's latest album with a haunting melody intitled "Indifference." The song's lyrics can very well serve as a contemporary view of the thoughts and feelings found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Giovanni from the short story "Rappacinni's Daughter."

"Rappacinni's Daughter" is a story about Giovanni Guasconti who moves to Padua, Italy, to continue his education. During his stay there, he is enchanted by his neighbor, the very odd and mysterious Dr. Rappacinni, and his daughter, Beatrice. Dr. Rappacinni is known throughout the city to be a mad scientist. He turns his backyard into an enormously lustrous botanical garden, which by appearance could be thought of as being the garden of Eden. However, the garden as well as Beatrice are only products of their father's obsession with science. They are sisters spun from evil's web. They were both created from the most deadliest of poisons. After spying on Beatrice from his overhanging window, Giovanni finds himself in love with the young girl. The very honorable Professor Baglioni warns Giovanni of the evil that possesses Beatrice, but it is too late. Giovanni has already become a victim of the poisonous breath of Beatrice. He too has been plunged into the isolated hell which Dr. Rappacinni has created. In hopes of saving himself as well as Beatrice, Giovanni offers her an anecdote which Professor Baglioni created. The story ends when Beatrice, being the poisonous creature she is, dies after drinking the anecdote. To her, the anecdote is poison. Giovanni gets left behind to live in the world he would never accept.

The first stanza of Vedder's song summarizes Giovanni's uncertainty for what he sees when he first encounters the lovely Beatrice. He can't distinguish whether or not she is a mere angel from heaven or evil in its most dreadful form. "What is this being?" he said to himself. "Beautiful shall I call her, or inexpressibly terrible?" After watching her for many days, Giovanni becomes obsessed with the idea that she is the light which illuminates his whole existence. His obsession soon overcomes his will to believe

anything that goes against the good of Beatrice. These ideas are equally expressed in the first four lines of "Indifference":

I will light the match this morning,

So I won't be alone.

I watch as she lies silent,

For assumed my will be gone.

The first line of the song is also an allusion to the sun, mentioned constantly throughout the story. "Guasconti mechanically did as the old woman advised, but could not quite agree with her that the Paduan sunshine was as cheerful as that of southern Italy." It is the light of the sun which reveals the truth behind the evil lurking within the shadows of the unknown. "For an instant the reptile contorted itself violently, and then lay motionless in the sunshine."

The next four lines of the song could symbolize the agony felt by Giovanni for the longing of physical interaction between Beatrice and himself. "He had never touched one of the gleaming ringlets of her hair ; her garment- so marked was the physical barrier between them- had never been waved against him by a breeze." This torment, which went on day after day as Giovanni and Beatrice continue to meet in the garden, is addressed in lines five through eight of "Indifference":

Oh, I will stand, arms outstretched

Pretend I'm free to roam.

Oh, I will make my way,

Through one more day.

The second stanza of the song serves as a testament for Giovanni's denial for what has happened and for what he has become:

I will hold the candle, till it burns up my arm.

Oh, I'll keep taking punches, until their will grows tired.

Oh, I won't change directions,

And I won't change my mind.

In the first line of the second stanza, the candle burning his arm is much like Beatrice's touch and more profoundly her love. When Beatrice did touch Giovanni in the story, her fingerprints were burned into his skin, foreshadowing the future which her love would bring Giovanni in the end. "Up rose the sun in his due season, and, flinging his beams upon the young man's eyelids, awoke him to a sense of pain. When thoroughly aroused, he

became sensible of a burning and tingling agony in his hand- in his right hand- the very hand which Beatrice had grasped in her own when he was on the point of plucking one of the gemlike flowers. On the back of that hand there was now a purple print like that of four small fingers, and the likeness of a slender thumb upon his wrist." The mention of the sun in these lines, again plays on the allusion that the truth is in the light.

The second line of this stanza echoes the intellectual warfare going on between Professor Baglioni and Dr. Rappacinni. It is this warfare which Giovanni uses as an excuse for Professor Baglioni's warning against the hypnotic perfumed breath of Beatrice. No matter what he is told, Giovanni has given into his obsession, and as expressed by the last two lines of this stanza, he will not change his direction or his mind. "But such a suspicion, though it disturbed Giovanni, was inadequate to restrain him... It mattered not whether she were angel or demon; he was irrevocably within her sphere..."

The last stanza only contains two lines. However, it is with these two lines that the climax of the story is reflected.

I'll swallow poison, until I grow immune.

I'll scream my lungs out, till it fills this room.

The first line, obviously, is a semblance for the fact that Beatrice has made poison her life blood. She is so used to it that she has become immune to its deadly powers. The second line of this stanza could suggest the perfumed smell that has filled Giovanni's room in the end. It has done this because like Beatrice, Giovanni has now become a poisonous thing.

The chorus line of the song epitomizes the ongoing question in Giovanni's mind of what he considers to matter and to not matter. In the beginning, he is so enthralled by the beauty of Beatrice that he believes nothing could ever make him doubt the goodness she holds within. However, in the end, it is this very doubt which causes the death of Beatrice. He is unable to accept her for who she is, and realizing this, Beatrice drinks the anecdote which to her is poison. It is in the chorus line, "How much difference does it make?" that Giovanni also causes his own downfall. Now, because of his indifference, he must exist alone, living the life which he so greatly detested.

The song in its entirety richly echoes Hawthorne's ideas and

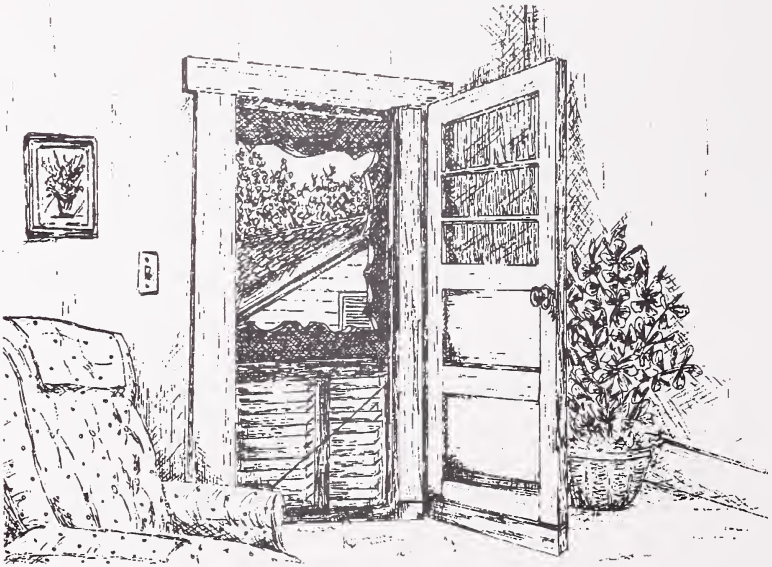
motives behind Rappacinni's Daughter." It parallels the voices of two generations very much alike in meaning, yet separated by miles of time. In a generation torn between many ruling odds, Eddie Vedder could perhaps be considered today's Hawthorne. He has offered a contemporary view of one of Hawthorne's greatest works, one which shouldn't go unnoticed.

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First Place, Literary Essay
MCCCWA



Jean Smith, Illustrator

Another Look at “Bartleby the Scrivener”

Bella Barham-Douglas

In Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” the focus of the story seems to be the character of Bartleby, a young man who has come to work for a Wall Street attorney. Hired by the attorney as a copyist, Bartleby’s calm defiant behavior appears to be the central aspect of the story. Because of his mysterious background, the reader knows nothing of Bartleby, except for the passive resistance he displays in the offices of the lawyer, who in fact is the story’s narrator. His degree of non-conformity helps the story move along, making it interesting for the reader who is waiting for the reactions of the people around him and possibly for an explanation for his odd behavior.

While the reader can be almost assured that the character of Bartleby is the main focus of the story, it takes more careful study of its entirety to see that the reaction of the attorney and his eventual acceptance of the scrivener’s quiet rebellion may be the true theme of this Melville tale. By following the lawyer’s initial tolerance of Bartleby and his charitable feeling of responsibility for him in the end, one can see a transformation within the heart and the thinking of the narrator, one which probably led him to a future of charity.

In relation to present day, we too, like the attorney in the beginning, tend to deny ourselves the time to consider the people around us, who may be hurting and in pain. To face them and their problems may cost us something in time or emotion and for many of us, that presents too much of a risk. What a shame it is though, that we have become accustomed to the appearance of the homeless and the pictures of abused children. As a society, we may never come to humane reform as Bartleby’s employer does, but we should make an effort as individuals to do so.

In the narrator’s self-introduction, he presents himself as an attorney with offices on Wall Street. Working closely with Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut, the attorney is mostly tolerant of their sometimes rude behavior. The lawyer knows that to keep the peace within the office is the best way to keep up the good work. It is, therefore, profitable to him for all to run smoothly within his office. But while it is easy enough for him to overlook his other

employee's eccentricities, he indeed has a more difficult dilemma with the case of Bartleby.

As a copyist, Bartleby does an extraordinary amount of work at first, but his adamant refusal to proof it, shocks, and unnerves the rest of office. Despite what the attorney may feel about the way Bartleby refused his request, his decision to "forget the matter for the present" only makes for a bigger shock the next time Bartleby refuses him. Upon the next refusal, the lawyer finds a way to justify the unusual behavior of the young copyist, by realizing how he can use him for business purposes. Although there may be some degree of pity on the part of the narrator, his motive for keeping the peace seems to stem from selfishness.

Upon finding Bartleby occupying the office on a Sunday afternoon, the attorney begins to feel something different about the young man. When he realizes that Bartleby is living in the office without family or friends, he begins to somewhat understand the eccentricities of Bartleby. For the first time in his life, the narrator is overtaken by melancholy: "The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! for both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam."

Pity is now what the lawyer is feeling for Bartleby, having decided that the young man must be suffering from some "innate and incurable disorder." But with all the pull that may be on the lawyer's heart, he admits to himself that he cannot help the soul of Bartleby. "And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor [aid], common sense bids the soul be rid of it." In effect, the lawyer plans to offer Bartleby the opportunity to be open and honest with him about himself and his history, and if Bartleby chooses to decline, the lawyer will have no choice, but to relieve him of his services, while offering him a bit of money and the promise of future aid.

After being confronted by the lawyer, Bartleby "prefers not to" even leave the office, much less to open up and talk about himself. He even refuses to do any more copy work, yet he still refuses to leave the office. Bartleby has turned his place inside the office into a "hermitage" and the lawyer is quite perplexed as to what to do for Bartleby. Although the lawyer is puzzled about the "poor passive mortal," he becomes reconciled to Bartleby, in keeping of the commandment he recalls to "love one another."

Too soon after he remembers the idea of unselfish charity, frustration about Bartleby overcomes the narrator again when his colleagues begin to talk about the strangeness Bartleby presents. The lawyer's worries increase and he becomes intent on ridding his office and himself of Bartleby. The lawyer is grievously torn between what he should do for him as a fellow human being and what he has to do as a responsible businessman.

His decision comes as one that may be seen as somewhat cowardly. He plans to move his whole business in hopes that Bartleby will have to leave. But on moving day, Bartleby stays, forlorn in his hopeless existence, refusing even the money that the lawyer tries to leave with him, and unresponsive to the helpless blessing offered to him.

Yet, to the lawyer's dismay, he learns that Bartleby is still occupying his old offices, and still refusing to leave. Going there to confront him once again, the lawyer considers every alternative possibility other than having Bartleby picked up by the constable. He mentions more than a few jobs that would interest any young man, but there is nothing that Bartleby will consider. He simply "prefers not to" discuss any one of them.

Finally, in some last desperate attempt at rescuing the wretched Bartleby from all his inexpressible despair, the lawyer asks him to go home with him. He offers to take care of him until his health and spirits improve. But again, in some sort of sacrificial refusal, Bartleby "prefers not to" go home with the lawyer. He remains there still, until the authorities take him to the Tombs [prison].

Upon hearing of Bartleby's whereabouts, the lawyer goes there with the hopes of having Bartleby placed in the alms-house. But the reaction he receives from Bartleby is inexpressible still, so the lawyer simply asks that he be looked after carefully. Bartleby even refuses to eat, and soon the lawyer returns to find that Bartleby has starved to death.

The last few attempts made by the lawyer to ensure Bartleby's well being, show how he had come full circle in his acceptance of this strange creature's non-conformity. He initially saw Bartleby as a useful, but troublesome employee, with the thought of indulging his strange and harmless behavior in order to benefit his business. But, Bartleby's passive resistance turns into something that even a green screen cannot hide. As the lawyer becomes

convicted in his heart of the bond he shares with this poor recluse of a man, he realizes that he cannot ignore his responsibility. In seeing that however un-conforming or intolerable they each may be, they are both sons of the same father, and members of the same race.

Finally, the narrator can no longer deny himself the real consideration of Bartleby. It seems from his last statement, delivered outside the Tombs where Bartleby's body lay, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" that he is crying out in pity, not only for Bartleby, but for himself and for all of humanity who have become blind to the suffering and anguish of their fellow man. This sorrowful profession comes at last as an expression of the narrator's helplessness in the face of Bartleby's indifference. He considered Bartleby to be someone who indeed was disturbed in his spirit, but the attorney's own passive resistance and ignorance of the human condition, allowed him for a while to resist his basic instinct of goodwill. This considerable man of Wall Street simply did not know how to settle his concerns for Bartleby, until it was virtually too late.

Too late for Bartleby, the scrivener, but it is not for the lawyer himself. He will come away from the Tombs with a commitment to live out the lessons that he has learned, and with a change of spirit that will be measured simply by his degree of charitable acceptance toward his fellow man.

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Honorable Mention, Literary Essay
MCCCWA

The Struggle Within

Kimberly Carpenter

The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka is a fictional portrayal of Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman who has worked most of his life to provide for his family, but awakens one morning to find himself trapped in the body of a beetle. Gregor's struggle to provide for his family has kept him from grasping life and its true meaning.

After Gregor's father loses his business, Gregor takes it upon himself to provide for his family. His sole purpose in life is to work because he believes his family is unable to provide for themselves. He lives his life without personal relationships and friends, thus causing his family to be the only people in his life, and he never really sees them, for he works all of the time.

Upon waking one morning as a beetle, Gregor's life is physically changed forever. He faces a new struggle, to be a part of his family. This is hard for Gregor because his family is repulsed by him. He is locked inside of his bedroom to live out his life apart from his family. The only ways of communication are through his sister's act of bringing his food daily and his eavesdropping through the walls between his room and the family's room. It is through his eavesdropping that he learns of his family's daily lives and frustrations to provide for themselves. On one occasion Gregor tries to show his family that he is indeed human by sneaking into the dining room to listen to his sister's violin music. But Gregor fails to accomplish this and is driven back into his room to live out the remainder of his life.

Gregor's constant struggles are met by failures, one being his failure to provide for his family. After his metamorphosis, the family must provide for themselves by getting jobs and leasing a room to three boarders. Gregor realizes through this that his family has been able to work all along, and they have just allowed Gregor to sacrifice himself because of their laziness.

Gregor also fails to become a part of the family because the sight of him repulses them. The family looks at Gregor's state in disgust and will not help him although he has wasted his life helping them. They see Gregor as a useless being, one they don't even want to have any communication with. To them, this beetle is not Gregor.

It is a monster that must be locked away until it finally dies.

Sadly enough, in the end, Gregor has still failed to grasp life and its meaning because when it has become apparent to him that his family can provide for themselves Gregor has now been hideously changed forever.

First place literary essay
Wesson Attendance Center

**The Beast Within:
William Golding's View of Evil**
Jessica Graham

In *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding creates an underlying current of the human nature of man, which flows through the novel and finally emerges providing the reader with a thought-provoking question: Is the nature of man good or evil? Golding himself gives an answer to this question in the final pages of his book where one sees good almost overpowered by the spreading of the chaotic evil within the boys on the island.

Throughout the novel a perfect example of the battle between good and evil is revealed through the tension between Ralph and Jack. Here Golding seems to prefer the triumph of evil by showing that there is no hope for good and that the omnipotent evil will eventually, in some form or fashion, devour any efforts of the good. A prime example of this ever-existent evil is shown in the rescue scene. The ship that will return the boys home is preparing to engage in a battle itself, chasing after an enemy much in the same way Jack chased after Ralph, with intentions that were far from morally correct. The rescue suggests the continuation of the evil that was just beginning to erupt on the island.

If one pays close attention, he or she can observe the attraction Golding shows towards the individual evil inhabiting the island. After a mediocre exploration, the boys realize they are alone on the island. The absence of an adult figure or disciplinarian marks the decline of the boys' ability to think sensibly, and the unleashing

of the boys' true emotions and personalities. Because no one is available to punish the boys for their wrongdoings, or to even point them out, the children are free to behave in any manner they choose. Where Maurice once received chastisement for harming another child - and though at first he feels uneasy in his cruelty towards others - he eventually becomes totally void of any sense of guilt or shame. Another consumed by an evil nature is Roger. A sadist at heart, Roger is filled with a being that feels natural only when afflicting others with pain. His brutal personality is one of the most deadly forces on the island, for it seems to draw forth the evil entities stirring within the other boys.

Perhaps the greatest presence of evil within the story, however, is Jack. A reincarnate of the devil himself, Jack is an effigy used by Golding to constantly stamp out any good that arises among the boys. Jack is selfish and belligerent, with no concern for others. The closest act of decency Jack exhibits is towards his most faithful of followers. The evil that runs through Jack's veins is pure enough to make Roger seem kind. At one point, during a pig dance, the good morals of Ralph and Piggy are extinguished beneath the heightened fire and brimstone of Jack's chaotic society. It is as if Ralph and Piggy are helplessly drawn in by an invisible leviathan fed by the interaction with the two boys.

While some may insist that Ralph's escape from Jack and his henchmen is a victory for good, William Golding provides no resolution to the conflicts of these human natures and there is no obvious victor. Instead Golding wishes to resurrect the evil in the story's unwritten future, further proving his belief that in life's vicious cycles, the evil components of man will always gain the upper hand. Even Ralph, the epitome of the smothered good within man, realizes this as he "wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true."

Second place literary essay
Wesson Attendance Center



Papa Louis

Sandra Dickey

The world rushes past the little house by the side of the road in the Mc Call Creek, Mississippi: Louis Cameron and wife Georgia Bell call it home. "Papa Louis," known and loved by everyone, sits on the old leaning porch and wonders why the rush. Born July 4, 1876, this tall, slender, gray-eyed man has run his race and realizes his die is cast.

As graceful as a gazelle as he enters the room, this 107 year old finds his way to his favorite spot in his favorite room. Cardboard boxes cover the bedroom walls to keep out the insensitive freezing cold. An old hand-made rug, in an array of vibrant colors, covers the damp bare floor. An old feather bed with cast iron head-and foot-boards adds a point of interest to the room; the patchwork quilt covering the bed is an heirloom from two generations of Camerons. In the center of the room sits a large, black, wood-burning, pot-bellied stove. Next to the stove sits a hand-me-down rocking chair in which Papa slowly sits.

As he begins to rock, the dancing light from the fire of the stove gives his fair skin a ghostly glow and causes his silver hair to shimmer. He takes his wrinkled old hands and slowly rubs his hair straight back. And now he begins to do what he does with so much nostalgia...tell stories of grandeur and stories of old.

He remembers the happy times spent playing ball, hunting and fishing. He recalls, "I quit ball 68 years ago. The huntin' n' fishin' I held on to a while longer."

He proudly says, "I have been a good citizen and have never been in jail. The law looks jes as good to me as a preacher. But I ain't never had no reason to be a'scared of 'em."

All but five months of his life has been spent within a few miles of Franklin County, his birthplace. Those five months, spent in Illinois, he still remembers. He says with regret, "It was jes to fur away from my Mama. I jes couldn't stay way off up there."

At age 42 he drank his first cup of coffee and took his first sip of "spirits." "And he was never no sport at drinking," Mama Georgia adds.

Now and then he smokes a pipe but he says, "Jes to keep the skeeters away while I'm on the porch."

Papa has cloudy memories of slavery. Though he was but a tot, he talks of plantation life and recalls the long days of sitting in the cotton fields while his parents worked them.

He also talks vividly of six wars: Spanish-American, Russia-Japan, World Wars I and II, Korea and Vietnam. This old man worried about the country through its depression and wars but today his concerns are greater than before. "I jes wonder if people will ever come to their sight so they can see," he says with wonder. "But I don't worry so much about tomorrow. I know I'll be gone before the wurs part comes."

Papa has only one regret—he will never own a home of his own. He sadly recalls, "I wanted one all my life. But the only time I could see my way clear, the "White Caps" kept coming in on people. I got discouraged and my time passed."

He worries that he and Mama Georgia won't be able to stay in the little tin-roofed house much longer, especially in the winter. Deadly cold fills the house and he can no longer provide the wood needed to keep them warm. But age, grace, patience and reading the Bible cause this old man to smile. Looking out of the window, his piercing-gray eyes fill with tears; he turns to Mama Georgia and says, "We'll get by—jes ain't gonna give up. And the good will come after while."

Papa gently gets out of the old hand-me-down rocker and gracefully creeps toward the door. On the road the world rushes by....

Second Place, General Essay
MCCCWA

An Immodest Proposal

Carole Dykes

Hello. My name is Victima de Crimina. I am a citizen of the confused and chaotic state of Violentia. Violentia is one of the fifty states that makes up the country of Terror Terra. As a citizen of this once small and safe state, I, like many others, have grown increasingly tired of this place we call home. I remember playing as a child in my front yard without feeling like prey to gang members and thugs. Today as I sit and stare through the tiny cracks between the steel burglar bars on my windows I see my neighbor racing to his mailbox. You might be thinking that he's expecting some significant piece of mail, when in reality he is racing for his life. This once safe, quiet neighborhood has become one of the many playgrounds for local criminals. Drive-by shootings, rape, beatings, and murder are common occurrences in my neighborhood. It's also quite ironic that I live in the elite section of town. I could only imagine what life is like on the other side of the tracks. Being a world renown sociologist with a college education and many years of travel and experience, I find myself making a plea for our people. In this plea I have a proposal which I believe will make our state fruitful once again.

Here in Violentia we have a very large penal farm known as Liberation. It is called this because virtually everyone who is sent here is set free after only serving a minute portion of their sentence. We have set free so many murderers and rapists to make room for the bad check writers and the plagiarists, that Liberation has become a safer place than my own home. I propose that we turn every criminal out. The prisons of our great state will be rid of the many faces of violence and crime which have plagued them for so long.

This cannot be done at once though. First we must gather up all the law abiding citizens of our state. This will not take long because there are only about 10,000 left. We shall bring all these people together and explain to them this plan for the revitalization of our state. I am sure they will see the promise this plan has and agree to it right away.

Once all have agreed, we will travel to Liberation. When we get there we will wait in a large holding area while the prison guards

release the inmates. Upon their release, each prisoner will be given an automatic machine gun, a machete, and a kilo of the drug of his choice. The point of this, you may ask, is simple. If we release our prisoners into what's left of our state, they will have no one but each other to direct their violence toward. This will, by my calculations, rid us of the criminal population completely. After all the prisoners have been set free, we shall be put behind bars. This is not to restrict the law abiding citizens, but to protect them.

I do not know exactly how long it will take for the criminals to kill each other off. I am really not concerned with this trivial matter because Liberation is quite a comfortable place to stay. Two years ago, while conducting a field experiment, I had the pleasure of spending a few days at Liberation. The cells are quite posh. Each is furnished with a king-sized waterbed, jacuzzi, entertainment center, and mini-bar. The waiting list for Liberation is quite long. It seems to me that even those criminals who are released are starting to commit more and more heinous crimes in hope that they will be sent back to Liberation. In all my travels I have never had such swift room service or such a wide variety of cable channels to choose from. Liberation is as nice as, if not nicer than, the Dorchester in London. Which, until visiting Liberation, was my favorite home away from home.

After a week of incarceration, we shall send one-half of the prison guards to the outlying county and city jails to release the local prisoners. These local prisons usually house the more minor offenders, such as burglars, rapists, and child molesters. Upon completion of this task, the guards shall return to Liberation for an indefinite period of time. Once the guards have returned, our cells shall be opened. We may then roam about the facilities as we please, though we may not venture outside the prison walls.

Periodically, the prison helicopter will be sent out to survey the progress of the criminals. Once the situation outside the prison walls is deemed "safe," a posse of officers will be sent to explore the state. If they have not returned within one month, another will be sent out in search of them. After all the officers have returned they will give a report to the people of Liberation. If the officers believe the state to be completely void of criminal activity, we shall be allowed to return to our homes to live out our lives in peace.

This proposal would end violence and save our state millions of dollars. Each year the hardworking, law-abiding people pay exorbitant taxes to keep these prisoners pampered and cozy. They're the ones that are safe, not the general public.

I pray that I have not offended anyone with my harsh tactics. I believe that the only way violence can be curbed is by allowing the criminals to kill again, but instead of killing ordinary citizens they would kill each other. Some would argue that I am no better than the criminals themselves because of my advocacy of murder. In my opinion this would not be murder, it would be the saving of thousands and thousands of innocent lives. Perhaps there are better, less radical methods for ridding our state of crime. I would be more than pleased if one of my fellow citizens would devise a plan with this purpose in mind. The criminal justice system of Terror Terra was once the mightiest on the planet. Now it is only known for its leniency and sympathy for the common heartless criminal.



Dewey Case, Illustrator

Katie's Closet

Shelly Herrington

It is perhaps the kindest thing she ever did for me. She thinks it's punishment—locked alone in a dark closet. It's really my refuge. The smell of liquor isn't so concentrated and at least if I am safely locked in the small room, she is on the other side of the door. It's the one place I can dream and sometimes almost believe. If I'm lucky she'll forget about me for a few hours.

From my bedroom window I can see the bedroom of the little girl next door. Her parents come to her room every night to tuck her in, hug and kiss her, asking if she'd like for them to read a bedtime story. She selects her favorite book of fairytales. I don't believe in fairytales, not since the one that begins once upon a time and ends with my father saying "Don't worry, Katie, I'll be back soon." That was five years ago. After awhile I quit waiting for the "happily ever after." But now, if I can close my eyes, for awhile I'll be in a frilly pink bedroom surrounded by toys and the girl next door will be in the closet.

It's not that I blame my father for leaving. I don't. Even then Mother's drinking problem was getting out of control and her moods swings were becoming more violent, but I can never forgive him for not taking me with him. After he left, she grew uglier. The alcohol and divorce aged her. Social drinking suddenly became her only sustenance.

For two hours every afternoon all is quiet, from the time I get home from school until the time Mother returns around six. They are two hours of total terror! I never know what condition she'll be in when she arrives. Will she be weepy and repentant, apologizing for my latest bruises, clinging to me in desperation, seeking to be comforted as she professes how things will be different from now on? Or, will her anger be raging?

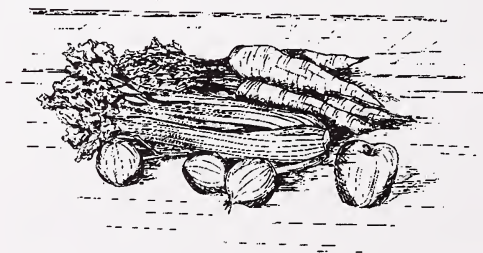
I can endure her violent temper better. The beatings don't hurt nearly as much as her empty promises. Each time I hear the key turn in the door I stiffen, preparing myself for her "arrival." Today she stumbled through the door already cursing with an intoxicated slur, muttering something about my bike.

With my lip swelling and my body aching from the blows, she shoved me into the closet. I used to hide to avoid the beatings,

but when she found me they were always worse. The best hiding place I ever had was the laundry basket. I used to bury myself among the dirty clothes. She never found me, until I got too big to hide there. When she finally discovered my secret spot she hit me so hard it hurt of weeks. Occasionally I got lucky. Once when I was six years old I accidentally broke a plate while washing the dishes. I heard her threats form the other room where she had spent the evening with Jack Daniels. I was so afraid all I could think of was "please don't hurt me, please don't hurt me."

Hearing her approach I ran upstairs and crawled under my bed. I lay there silently crying, dreading the encounter those thudding steps would bring. She began slamming doors and turning over furniture looking for me. Before I knew it she had passed out on top of my bed. The low springs were crushing into my chest. I struggled to escape the weight. When I finally pulled myself out my chest hurt and my back was badly scratched. My first instinct was to run, go far away. But run where? Instead I went downstairs to my closet and shut out everything. Darkness isn't really so bad. It covers the black eyes and bruises, and protects me from her ugliness.

I don't have many friends at school. Acquaintances, yes, but I'm always afraid that if I get too close they'll find out I'm not like them. Today I met the new girl at school. Her name is Gina and her eyes are as hollow as mine. Even though she looks normal on the outside, I know she has fallen down those same stairs I have and gotten black eyes from that same fall. I wonder if Gina has a closet, too?



Jean Smith, Illustrator

Headlights

David Carner, Jr.

Driving on a little country road he told me about his DUI and about how his parents were taking it. He and I had never talked about anything serious; we had never felt the need to criticize each other. In a way I guess that is why we were so comfortable around each other. I felt I should say something about his situation, but I didn't know what. We just watched the trees disappear over our heads, escaping from the headlights into their natural darkness. When I left him I asked him if he thought everything would blow over with his parents in a little while. He said they would.

Little did I know that only a week later I would be taking a similar drive with him, only this time our destination would be a friend's house where he would live for a while. His dad had said he hadn't changed enough to suit him since the DUI and had asked him to leave.

We first went to his parents' house to get his things. Not wanting to go inside with him and sit with his parents while he packed his stuff, I told him I would wait outside. His things were already stashed in the trunk of his car, though. Apparently he wasn't expected to return inside the house.

Through the beams of my headlights, their paths illuminated by the fog and a misting rain, I watched him load two bags and his school books into my Jeep. His dad wouldn't let him take his guitar, telling him it was going to be pawned. He'd taught himself to play it and it was the only one he had ever owned. If anything about his leaving hurt him it was the loss of his guitar. I can't recall how many times and how many places we'd sat around singing while he played that guitar, bound by the spirit that emerges only when you are captivated by the sound of a lone acoustic six-string.

I'd never been down the road that took us to his friend's place. When we reached the trailer which would become his house, he got out and knocked on the door. Again I chose to stay in my car and watch through the headlights. For some reason I found security there.

Nobody answered the door and I offered to take him back to my house or to a phone, but he declined. He moved everything he

now owned to the foot of the steps leading into the trailer and said he would wait there. I said goodbye, and again I wanted to say something encouraging. As with all the other times when I had tried to say something heartfelt to him, nothing would come but my usual, "Later man." As I turned the Jeep around to leave I got stuck in the mud, a product of the last two days' rain. Putting it in four-wheel drive, I managed to make it out. But all the while the mud kept holding me, pulling me back. I wondered if the mud's captivity of me was his desire for company manifested through nature. I kept going though, taking one last glance back to see him sitting on the steps looking off into the darkness. There were no street lights in this area. He would never have asked me to stay, he wasn't ever one to ask for much of anything, so I left him. I wondered what would have happened if I'd stayed?

The ride home was lonely, but it didn't seem to take as long as the drive the other way had. At times it's a lot easier to go back to where you came from, especially when you need to run from the pain you can feel.

The lights of the town rising up to meet me as I hit the city limits gave me some comfort. Not only could I see where I was going, but I could see my surroundings. As I stopped at the first intersection, I wondered if he could say that about the path he took?

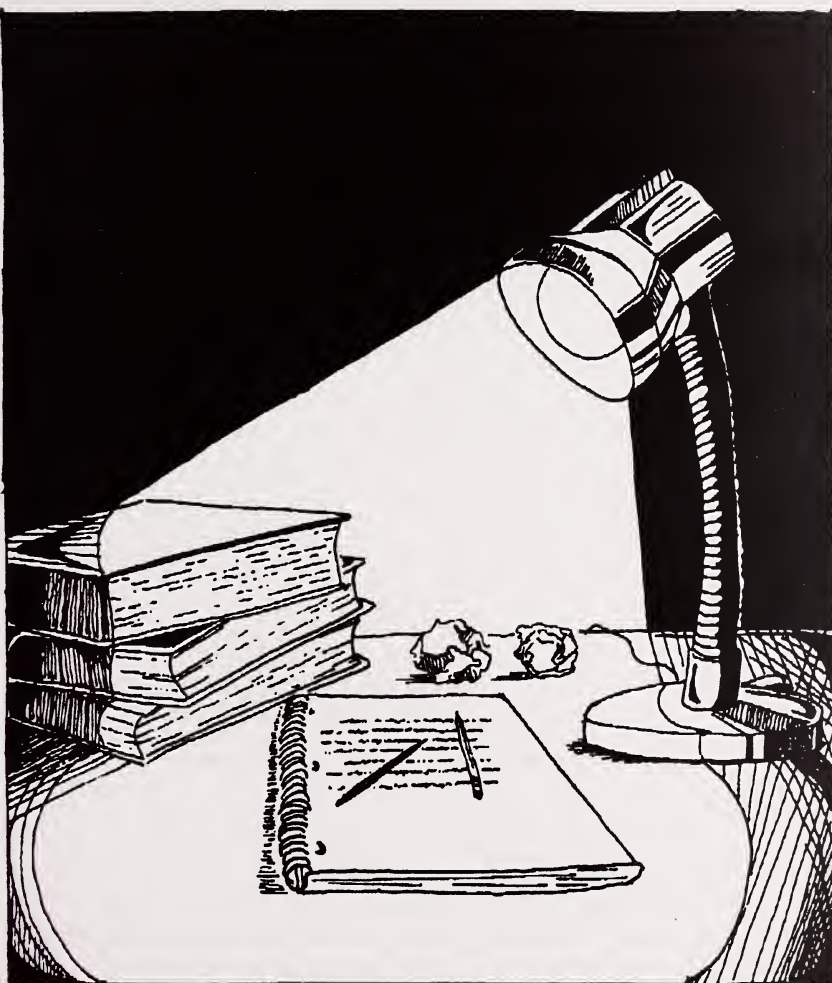
Now at home in my room, the past events of this evening puzzle me. Why did he choose me to take him away from his home to another house? Why am I so emotionally and spiritually overwhelmed by what I have observed and the part I have played in this minute moment of my life? Maybe it is because at this moment I am sitting in my home, a place where I feel welcome, where I feel loved. My parents don't like many of the positions I take or many of the things I do, but they would never tell me not to come home, even for something as serious as a DUI. Not being able to talk to him about it makes it even worse. But I don't think I would want to talk about it either. He's been talked to enough, and maybe my silence is a gift he receives gratefully.

I left him out on a little gravel road on the steps of a trailer. I wonder what he's doing now. I wonder where he is, I wonder what he's thinking. I wonder if he's feeling.

I finish this piece here because all that is left is the future.

Headlights reach only so far on any road, and sometimes they just don't help and you have to pull off to the side and wait until your way is discernible. I wonder how long he will wait? I left him there, no street lights to familiarize him with his surroundings, my headlights pointing in the opposite direction.

First place essay
Microcosm award



Chad Calcote, Illustrator

How to Paint Your Curtains For No Reason At All (or, How to Relieve Your Boredom)

Amy Smith

Okay. Face it. You're bored. If you weren't, you wouldn't be reading this essay. Don't be ashamed -- it happens to us all quite often, usually more than we'd like; you're not alone. At this moment, you have a million brothers and sisters, all steeping in a stew of inactivity, mired in a morass of dullness. A million souls which could be otherwise engaged in a storm of bright, crackling, creative work.

Sound familiar?

So, now that you've identified your problem, you can deal with it. First, you must promise yourself not to think of the words "stupid," "pointless," "useless," or "silly." Deport them. Substitute the words "eccentric," "fun," "creative," and "zany" in their places, and give them citizenship. Be prepared to set yourself free. Don't worry if you think you aren't one of those "creative people"; the potential is in everyone.

Next, dress down. Find your oldest, most comfortable, most beat-up outfit and put it on. This is, from now on, your suit of playclothes. But by no means look in a mirror.

Now. Go outside. Breathe deeply. Wander. Look closely at everything. It doesn't matter if it's raining, either -- in fact, it's a plus. (When was the last time you took a walk in the rain?) Inspect any flowers you come upon. Try to coax a butterfly to eat from your hand (hint: they adore peach juice!). Spin in circles until you're giddy with dizziness and laughter. Roll down a hill. Find a swingset and a willing friend and try to do all the swinging tricks you used to know. Take off your shoes and wade in puddles. After you've done a few (or all) of these things, you will no longer be bored. You will be bursting with the need to fan the flame you've lit inside.

This is the perfect time to paint curtains. Don't think twice. Just do it. And do it messily. It helps if you have pale-colored curtains to start with, but if not, well, recycle an old sheet and make some. Use any old paint, and don't worry too much about brushes -- you probably wouldn't use them anyway. Use sponges and pieces of yarn and your fingers. Or, if you're not the painting type, be a

deviant and tie-dye them. It's just as messy and often has beautiful results.

Inevitably there will be those of you out there who feel that your curtains are perfectly adequate, or perhaps you're a strict blinds person; no big deal. This essay is not just about renovating curtains; it's about doing the unexpected. Going off on a tangent. There are an infinite number of ways to free yourself of boredom; you just have to open your mind and find them.

Here are some ideas to set you on your way.
Find natural objects (rocks, deer antlers, turtle shells, etc.) and make stuff out of them. Paint them. Glue them. Hang them. Collect them. It's up to you.

Read a book of poetry and then write a poem in that poet's style. Or climb a tree and watch the sunset, and then go write a poem about what sitting in a tree and watching the sunset feels like. Find a book about the constellations, and then drag your family out on the first clear night and stargaze.

Play with the little kid across the street.

Write yourself a love letter.

Sing a lot and paint on your walls.

Make windchimes out of tin cans and hang them from tree limbs.

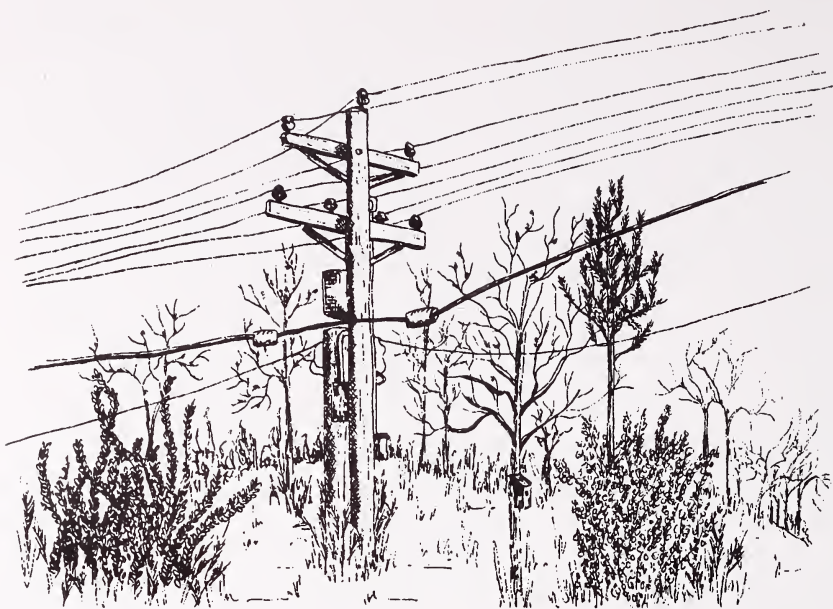
Rearrange your furniture.

Bake a cake from scratch and give it to someone you love. These are only a few ideas; run with them. The more creative things you do, the more you will think of.

Try creativity. You'll love it. I promise.

Brookhaven Academy
Second place essay
Microcosm award





Jean Smith, Illustrator

Things Have Changed Since Ozymandias

Larissa Thames

I met a stranger on the late night bus
Who said: Two thin and wretched legs of bone
Lie in a gutter. Above them, on the concrete
Half-dead, a tear-stained visage lies, whose scarred
And wrinkled lip and cry of hopeless dejection
Tell that his life never knew the passions
Which yet survive, stamped on men's determined faces.
Their hands have mocked him, his heart unfed.
And on the door above, these worn words appear:
 "Shelter Condemned. Keep Out!"
Men look on these words in misery and despair.
Decay is all that remains. 'Round the ruin
Of that shattered shell, dirty and cluttered
The cold hard streets stretch far away.

First Place Poetry
MCCCWA

Airborne

Larissa Thames

He held me
with the beating wings
of bats and angels.
This my mind returns to
a moth kissing the carport light,
a bird crashing the invisible window.
This memory, a mosquito bite,
itches the knuckle of my heart.
I search the air for signs of him,
Thoughts flitting like flying things.

Second Place
Southern Literary Festival



Karon Butler, Illustrator

The Legacy

Shelly Herrington

Big brown man wearing
Red flannel vest
Callused hands, soil carressed
Stands over plow gazing,
Smiling at the fields below
Calls his son to a nearby tree
Saying:

“Homestead, he did,
your great grandpa
in the year of 1887,
acres and acres...
Staked his claim
in the field he's plantin'
My grandpa took over
then pa, then me”

All he surveyed was
All he had, for
Nurished in the soil was also pride
With seeds of heritage fortified
Taking son's hand presses
Into palm one tiny seed
Passing to him the legacy

Third Place Poetry
MCCCWA

After reading several of Alexander Pope's poems and examining the time of Neoclassicism, the following satirical poem was composed.

I Present A Motion For No Emotion

Karon Faust Berry

The hastened extinction of mood would be quite divine
For it ultimately ensures the prudent one's decline.
One must remain clear and reasonable today;
Feelings and passions would only lead us astray.
They tempt us down a dark and wretched path
For which the end is only filled with wrath.

So dear people learn to be silent and elusive
Making your way of life very seclusive.
Forever remain in control and be wise in all
Seek not intoxicating hysterics lest you fall.
Pursue moderation in performances you undertake
Because present and future generations are at stake.

Sincerity should forever remain all but lost
For it carries much too considerable a cost.
Never speak of your passion's compulsive bend,
But be only quiet like unto the gentle wind.
One must bridle his actions with deepest thought
So that extraneous signs remain sheathed as ought.

All of us know that a man who loudly cries
Would look weak and frail in all society's eyes.
Like a child in the street who is left unrestrained,
He should humbly seek quickly to be refrained.
Showing any emotion like love or hate
Would cause your intellect quickly to terminate.

If you see the dark blue clouds roll in the sky,
You should quake and shudder not in your reply.
For fear, it has no place in a proper man's mind,
Because fear will only destroy and also blind.
Into yourself you should retreat and hide
The turbulence and storm that rages deep inside.

Some say they've heard laughter coming from a crowd;
Certainly they jest for we indeed are proud.
Seek to find happiness and peace in meditation
Not in swelling outcries of jubilation.
Have the countenance of a whisper always,
Be hushed and diminished as we live our days.

Sympathy nor compassion should you instigate
For such activities would undoubtedly frustrate.
Swiftly purge your mind of these very things
Admitting room for thought, not foolish utterings.
Monotony and suppression should be freed
To avow a man genuine success indeed
cause your intellect quickly to terminate.



Rose Hawley, Illustrator

The Ag Cat

Beth Selman

Across the sky he roars

With wide spread

yellow wings.

Looping round and round

Under electric lines making

smokey rings.

With propellers turning

Lower and lower his

belly approaches,

Dodging fences and

Skimming soybeans full of

worm poachers.

An odd sight to see:

He weaves back and forth

through the sky

Swooping and soaring

Gracefully like a giant

yellow butterfly.

Paul

Elizabeth Farnsworth

silently creeps he
amongst the furry synthetic green
my midget smiling spider alligator
love
the center of the universe
radiates
light into grey matter - mushy oatmeal
with pure innocence
trust
may I always be there for you,
my mischievous Prince of spoons
cheerios and bananas
will you take my hand?
-or just a finger-
take me into your world
of joy.

Brookhaven High School
Scholarship Award



Claude Allen, Illustrator

Squares Fell

Robin Clark

Squares fell down into my stomach
One by one
Blue ones,
Green ones,
Yellow ones,
And of course, purple ones
Until they were no longer innocent ingredients
in a collage
But a furious cauldron of hallucinations.

I turned to a red one
and asked,
“What were you
before you were
squares?”
“Spiders,” he replied.
And then balancing himself
on my tongue, he jumped.

How can a bag of seven colors
Hold the 8th wonder of the world?
Glaring down into it like a kaleidoscope,
I am kept fascinated for hours.

Mendenhall High School
Second place award poetry

Return to Redfish Bayou

June Coghlan

Beau Jack LeMieux came out onto his front porch just in time to see the last bit of sun slip below the horizon. Joe Couvillion's battered Ford pickup sat just inches from the porch railing. Joe himself sat hunched on the second step of the porch, coaxing the last few drops from his beer bottle. He studied the bottle momentarily, then stuck it neck-first into the ground.

"Wanna go down to the County Line tonight?" he asked.

"I don't think so," Beau Jack muttered.

The County Line Bar and Grill sat right on the edge of the Mississippi and Louisiana state lines on the Mississippi side. It was Joe's home away from home.

Joe heaved himself off the step. "Suit yourself. I'll see you around."

He climbed into the Ford and vaporized into a cloud of dust, leaving Beau Jack to survey his surroundings. His brow furrowed momentarily and he wandered off the porch, eyes taking in the farm. Two hundred acres, mostly overgrown with cockleburs and tall grasses and cedarweeds. A few saplings nosed upwards along the fencerows. Vines climbed up the sides of the cinderblock dairy barn. It hadn't seen a cow in five years.

Without realizing it he wandered into the barn. In the milking parlor his footfalls echoed on the concrete floor. He closed his eyes against the sight of yellowed milk lines and dirt dobber nests. He leaned against the cold, damp wall and tried to remember what it was like before. When the vacuum pumps hummed and the pulsators clicked. When the pastures were green. When his daddy's voice floated out of the parlor as he shouted at the cows over the din of the pumps and pulsators.

His daddy had gambled the dairy away. It took him a good while. When Beau Jack turned fifteen, his daddy seemed to get drunk more and more often. He took less time with his work, spent heifers here and there to pay off the bets. It took six replacement heifers to pay off the Superbowl. Ten to pay off the World Series. Two or three for every playoff game leading up to both events. Eventually he fell behind on his Farmer's Home loan payments.

By the time Beau Jack was twenty his father was dead. His

mother had never milked a cow in her life. She sold the remaining herd and died a year later.

Yet something inside Beau Jack couldn't let go of the farm. He tried to get a loan to get the place running again but nobody, especially FmHA, was interested. He worked offshore, but he couldn't make enough to get out of the hole his daddy had dug. Now he was twenty-five years old, and he was going to lose everything.

He drifted back to the porch and studied the beer bottle Joe had left behind. Beau Jack didn't drink. He never went to the County Line with Joe. The specter of his father loomed there. He was afraid he'd walk in and see his daddy shooting pool.

The sound of Joe's truck drew his attention. It ground to a stop outside the house. Joe staggered out and grabbed Beau's shirt. He was drunk.

"Joe, what's goin' on?"

Joe waved a longneck at Beau. "She dumped me, that's what. Cassie dumped me. She says I drink too much. She ain't gonna git away with this. I need to straighten her out." He staggered back a step, pulling Beau with him. "What you think about it?"

"Maybe she's just upset; she'll cool off. Just let it rest awhile."

Joe hurled the bottle so fast that Beau Jack almost didn't duck in time. It whizzed past his left ear and shattered against the porch railing.

"I ain't gonna let nothin' rest!" he shouted hoarsely. He crawled into the Ford and was gone. Beau Jack stared after him for a long time. The ringing of the phone took him inside.

"Beau Jack, this is Ira Birch at the FmHA. I was callin' to make sure you got the foreclosure notice."

"Yeah," he said tonelessly. The letter was in his breast pocket. It had been burning a hole in his heart all day.

"Well, I wanted to be sure you knew to clear out, boy. You know, I told you when your daddy died to let us have it. Would've saved us all a bunch of trouble. I don't know what you insist on hangin' on to it for."

Beau Jack let the realization sink in. There was nothing left to fight with. He had exhausted every application and appeal. He hung up on Ira Birch.

For a long time he lay on the couch, staring at the ceiling and

trying not to think. It didn't work.

The phone rang again at midnight.

"Beau LeMieux? This is Jimmy Breaux, Jefferson Parish sheriff. We got a situation out here on Harbor Road. It involves Joe Couvillion. I was told you know him."

"What's he done?"

"He's pretty drunk. Got his girlfriend in the truck and he's wavin' a gun around."

Something that felt like a hot wire glowed in his stomach, then faded. His throat clicked.

"I'll be there in a minute."

He had no idea what he would do or say when he got to Harbor Road. Joe had a quick temper when he was sober, and an even quicker one when he was drunk. Beau Jack didn't need Joe's problems at this point. He was supposed to clear out by noon on Wednesday, three days away. He needed to figure something out. Anything.

He slowed the jeep to a crawl when he turned onto Harbor Road. Blue bubble lights strobed the sky. Six sheriff's department cars were parked in a semi-circle around Joe's green Ford. Beau Jack parked behind one of the cruisers and stood beside his jeep, uncertain. Sheriff Breaux turned out to be a fat man in his early sixties with a ragged mustache and a wrinkled uniform. Beau could tell he had fully expected another drunk to show up.

"I don't know how this gonna turn out, boy. You got any idea how to git him outta there?"

"I don't know. When he gets like this, you can't hardly do nothin' with him. Usually he cools off. He ain't never done nothin' like this before."

Joe had caught sight of Beau Jack standing behind the bank of cars.

"Hey, Beau, you wanna come join the party?"

"Joe, I think the party's over." He started toward the Ford.

Sheriff Breaux grabbed his arm. "Where the hell you goin'? You're gonna git yourself killed, boy."

Beau wrenched himself free. "He ain't gonna shoot me," he said almost irritably. He wished all these people would leave.

"Joe, you better let Cassie out of there, okay?"

"Aw, Beau. You an' those dam deputies. We're just tryin' to git

things worked out in here.”

“Why don’t you let me keep the gun. Just til you an’ her get things settled.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Joe, please give him the gun,” Cassie was in tears and for some reason it made Beau Jack hate her. At that moment he didn’t care if she got out or not. She was whining and pleading with Joe and it was irritating the hell out of Beau. He suppressed the urge to tell her to shut up. The October night was cool and the dead and dying leaves rustled in the woods bordering the road.

“Joe, you’re gonna be in a mess if you don’t stop this,” Beau said evenly.

“I’m already there,” Joe said. “You better git on outta here, Beau Jack.”

Beau retreated to his jeep.

Sheriff Breaux leaned against the trunk of a cruiser. “He ain’t comin’ out. He ain’t lettin’ her out neither.”

“Back everybody off. Ain’t none of this helpin’ any.”

“You know I can’t do that, boy. I got a drunk an’ a fight an’ a gun out here, and I can’t leave it. You done what you could, now leave it to us.” The old man turned on his heel and headed toward a huddle of deputies.

Something beyond the glare of the headlights caught Beau Jack’s attention. In a blur, Cassie bolted from the truck. Screaming hysterically and blinded by the headlights, she headed for the bank of cars.

“Oh, dammit,” Beau Jack moaned, and pressed his head to the hood of the jeep.

Blinded by the headlights as well, Joe pulled off one wild shot. It did not hit Cassie, but she fell anyway. And just to her left, a deputy fell too.

Beau turned away. From where they stood behind the lights, Jimmy Breaux and his remaining deputies had clear view of Joe Couvillion. He had one foot out of his truck when they shot him.

Sitting on the cold asphalt, Beau Jack couldn’t feel anything. All he could think of was a deer he and Joe had once headlighted. It just stood there stupidly until they shot it.

By the time the sheriff’s department was through with him, it was daylight. He had basically been told to go home and keep his mouth shut.

When he stepped outside, Cassie was standing next to the jeep. When she saw him she started to cry. He passed her wordlessly

and climbed into the driver's seat.

"Beau, what are we gonna do?" she asked. "What happened?"

Beau looked at her calmly. "We ain't gonna do nothin'."

She looked shocked, as if he had hit her, disbelief etched into her face.

"Ain't you gonna give me a ride home?" she asked in a childish tone.

"Hitch," he said, pulling away from the curb.

"Beau Jack!" she walked four or five steps down the street, then covered her face with her hands and cried hysterically.

Beau Jack drove home, or what used to be home, he reminded himself. He sat listening to the engine tick as it cooled. Outside the breeze rustled the dry foliage--dead oak leaves, cockleburrs and the weeds that grew up in the barnyard and near the front porch.

Joe's beer bottle was still there, stuck neck-first into the ground. Did all that happen last night? It seemed like a long time ago. Another lifetime. Somebody else's lifetime.

The breeze gusted; leaves drifted down onto the porch, piling against the house like dirty snowflakes. What about those leaves? They had seemed important to him last night, when he had had so much else on his mind. They stirred an idea.

He averted his gaze to the floorboard on the passenger side, brow furrowed, trying to remember. The answer was on the floorboard, actually there, could you believe it? It was written in tall blue block-style letters with white borders. Like a flashing sign on the side of the highway. E-Z Strike Matches. A little flaming matchstick with arms, legs and a smiling face gazed up at him. He gazed back, enthralled. His heart beat so hard it hurt. His head pounded. He bit his lip and reached out to pick up the box, as if it might suddenly vanish if he moved too fast. It didn't.

He put it in the breast pocket of his shirt. The smiling matchstick-man rested there comfortably, face against the foreclosure notice.

The grinding of car tires on the gravel jarred him. He stepped out of the jeep apprehensively, as if someone passing on the road might have read his thoughts and come to stop him.

It was Ira Birch. "I've been trying to call you all morning. I was tryin' to tell you I found a buyer for the place. A couple from Memphis. They're lookin' for a summer place." The couple

climbed out of the car, looking around.

"Why don't you go for a drive. Come back in about an hour," Birch said.

Beau Jack sized the couple up. Middle aged. Wearing their outdoor wear from L.L. Bean. Looking like excited kids.

"Oh well, it does need some work. But isn't the house so cute?" she gushed. We could definitely work with this."

"I was thinking of getting some cows," the man said as they headed toward the barn.

Beau Jack headed for Redfish Bayou, where the breeze rippled the dark water.

A summer home. A few cows. Oh yes, we have the quaintest little place down in Louisiana. You really have to come down one summer.

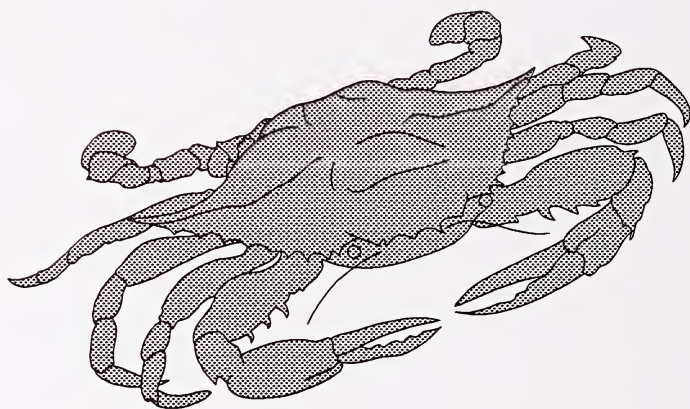
Something inside him welled up, like a bubble rising in a pool. It surfaced, wobbled there for a moment, then burst. He lay his head against the steering wheel. Please please make this go away. Nothing mattered now. Not consequences, not anything. Ed McMahon obviously wasn't going to drive up and award him ten million dollars in the next forty-eight hours. It was just a matter of time before the couple from Memphis could start putting up their whitewashed fence and decide what color cows matched the housepaint.

He drove around for a long time, stopping to buy two gallons of gas in a battered old can. Biding his time, he drove back out to Redfish Bayou and watched the sun set on the water. Whatever there had been inside him that might stop this was gone. It had died some hours ago. He had a single purpose. He sat in the jeep and waited patiently for midnight. When it came he drove calmly to the farm and set himself to his task.

He drizzled gasoline from the porch, working his way to the barn and sprinkling the last few drops over the leaves. Then he carefully unfolded the foreclosure notice and struck a match. He watched the flame sputter, then flare and climb up the edge of the paper. As the flames licked his fingers, he dropped the paper into the puddle of gas and watched the fire grow. It blossomed, feeding at first on the gasoline, then fanning out all over, heading for the pasture, the barn and the house all at once. He headed to his jeep

and backed out of the driveway. He went out to Redfish Bayou again because he didn't want to watch it burn.

Honorable Mention, Short Story
MCCCWA



Tale of the Gardener

Dasha Allred

I remember thinking for a blunt second that this was mad, that it really shouldn't have come to this. But a second later, and the fire was shot.

It took him a long time to die. I just sat and watched as he slowly descended to the floor. I think I heard him say my name. It was faint and sounded like the fading end note of some long, drugged melody.

He whispered, "Eleanor, my sweet Eleanor. Do you love me?" Eleanor. I always did hate that name. And to hear it spoken from this man, well, I guess it doesn't matter now.

I believe it must have been a little over a year after my husband's death when he came into my life. You see I was in desperate need of a new gardener after the old one had retired, his old, achy bones too brittle for gardening. Yes, this was when Mr. Eric Fletcher arrived at my doorstep.

He just came out of nowhere. He said he had heard I needed a gardener, and that he could handle the job. He seemed sincere, so I hired him.

He was to work my gardens and tend to other tasks which my feminine frame would never endure. In return, I gave him a room at the top of my garage, along with a respectable paycheck at the end of every week.

Eric was a man of a peculiar nature. He spoke with a proper tongue and broad language. His voice was very tranquil and always at ease. To hear him over a phone, one might think he were the Pope. But from appearance... well he looked like a mountainman. His eyes were wild, and he never blinked. I always dreaded looking into those gray orbs. He would just sit there and watch me like a hawk waiting to strike its prey. It drove me crazy. His nose was long and pointed like a bird's beak. His hair was thick with black curls which seemed to envelope his entire face except, of course, those fiery eyes. He was a man of great height. I honestly can't say much for his body because I never caught even a glance of it. You see, he always had on this big army-green raincoat. If it was one hundred degrees outside, he had on that smelly raincoat. He looked like a big armadillo whollering around in my rose garden.

I don't know why I didn't just fire him, but I also don't know what possessed me to hire him in the first place. Maybe it was pity. But pity or not this man really got to me. It seemed the more I hated him, the more intrigued I was. The more I wanted to be around him.

After a month or so I began to get used to him and his grizzly smell. I began to cook him breakfast and occasionally entertained him with a large dinner. We didn't say much. We just watched each other. I watched in hope of detaching one morsel of evidence as to what he was, and I don't know why he watched me. Maybe he thought I was strange.

One night during dinner, out of the blue, he asked me how my husband died. The question frightened me, so I told him that dinner was over.

"But I've not finished mine," he said.

His remark was followed by a sharp look from the corners of my eyes. He retrieved his dishes and left me alone to dessert. I hated him for leaving. Being the weakling he was, his obedience made me dislike him more. It was just too much.

The next night he inquired of my husband's death once more. I told him that he shot himself on the way home from a golf tournament. Then I watched for his reaction, but nothing in his glance changed.

"Did you love him?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Do you ever miss him?"

"Sometimes. Yes, I miss him very much."

"Why did he kill himself?"

"I don't know, I guess he didn't love me. Why are you so interested anyway?"

He then said he was tired and left the room. On the way out the kitchen door, he looked at me with those weird eyes and asked me, "Could you ever love another man?" My heart began to beat fiercely with each breath. He didn't wait for an answer, and I knew it wasn't a real question, it was a suggestion. One that scared the hell out of me.

I watched from the window of my kitchen until I saw his light cut off. Then I ran to make sure all the doors and windows were locked. I cut all the lights out, ran upstairs, and cut my stereo up

so loud that the scream of a wild panther would have been drowned out, and I was that wild panther. I stripped off all my clothes and ran around my room dancing madly. People passing could see my silhouetted body gliding from one curtain to the next. Eric could see me. I dove into my bed and cried. Then I began to laugh. I got up from my bed and gathered every picture I ever had of my husband, went downstairs and burned them in the fire. I sat in the rocking chair in front of the fire and sang myself to sleep. I could hear Albinoni's "Adagio" playing in the background. I felt very weak, and then I felt nothing. "Could I ever love another man?" That was the question I played in my mind over and over again. No.

The next morning I awoke and found myself wrapped in a large quilt my grandmother had made me before her death. It still smelled like her. The fire had left with the night, and in its place came the chill of the morning.

I knew I had a busy day ahead of me, so I immediately got up and got dressed. I had to prepare for that night. I bought the most suitable dress for the occasion. It was white, outlining my body like snow. It was soft and sure to catch any wandering eye, begging for attention then shaming it. It was full of grace and totally feminine.

I prepared the dinner table with fresh white roses from my garden and outlined them with candles slightly scented to match my perfume. I sat and waited for the sound of his muddy boots as they scratched across the doormat, but he never came. I blew out the candles and went outside. As I walked across the yard, the moon followed me and seemed to cry with me. I stopped in front of my rose garden and sat on the little wicker bench where I often came to gather my thoughts. Suddenly I felt a hand nudge my shoulder. I quickly turned around to find Eric standing in front of me. I felt like I was going to throw up. I wanted to run.

"Were you expecting someone for dinner?" he asked. I looked at him in shock then I began to play along.

"Yes, but he couldn't make it," I replied. "He was called out on a job at the last minute."

"Well, we shouldn't let all that food go to waste, will you join me?" he asked holding his arm out for my answer. His demanding nature make me burn. I took his arm and followed him to the

house and then into the dining room where he had already relit the candles. He seated me and then himself.

"So who was the person for whom a woman of even your temperament would go to the trouble of preparing such an extravagant meal as this one, only to leave you?" he asked never changing his tone.

"It was just a friend."

"Just a friend?"

"Yes, just a friend. He's an obstetrician and was called out unexpectedly to deliver twins."

"I see. Why didn't you tell me before? Were you just going to let me walk in on the two of you expecting my dinner? Do you know how embarrassing that would have been?" I was shocked by his reaction. He really didn't know that the meal was prepared for him. This made me so angry, but I retained my composure.

"I'm sorry, but obviously it doesn't matter now, does it? My friend didn't come."

"I suppose you're right. I shouldn't be upset," he said sympathetically. He then arose and cut on the soft sounds of music. Approaching me, he lifted his hand for a dance. We danced slowly, never touching, never even exchanging glances. I dared not to look at him for fear that he might not be there at all and also for fear that my illusion might be shattered, that he would again be only my gardener. It was the waltz of beauty and the beast. We only danced to one song and then he kissed my hand. "It is time for me to leave now," he said as he turned and walked away. I wanted to say something, but I couldn't. I heard the door slam and his footsteps delicately tapping at the walkway. I heard my name whispered across the air. "Goodnight, Eleanor." It came and left me with a feeling of accomplishment. I went upstairs and went to bed.

The next morning I awoke and found on my doorsteps a letter. Inside the letter I found a dead butterfly, dried to perfection. It was soft and white like the dress I'd worn the night before. I began to read the letter.

Eleanor,

*I have to go into town for a while. I'm not really sure
when I will be back, but I will finish the gardens
when I return.*

Love, Eric

He never said anything of the butterfly. This puzzled me and then I remembered what the letter said. I knew he didn't have a car. Dropping the letter and butterfly, I ran to the garage. My car was gone. I was so angry. I lived miles away from anything, and he had left with my car. I trusted him with my feelings, and he ran off with my car. How could I have been so foolish, so naive. I ran out to the rose garden and began chopping at the roses with an axe. I then ran back and got a bottle of lighter fluid and a box of matches. The ground beneath me began to crackle. I cried out. I was a mass of burning anger. I burned every rose and every thorn. Only blackness remained. I pulled up my wicker chair and watched as the smoke ascended into the sky. He had left me. Just as everyone else had left me. I ran inside crushing the beautiful butterfly under my feet, just as I had been crushed by the beast. The beast that would pay.

I awoke in front of my fireplace, and to my surprise, Eric was sitting in front of me asleep. I thought to myself that it all must have been a dream. I jumped up and went outside only to find a ground of smut. I was embarrassed. I knew my car was back, and that was all I cared about.

I walked back inside and began to cook breakfast. A little while later Eric appeared in the doorway. He looked at me with those still half-asleep eyes. I asked him if he would like some breakfast, and he said that he was starving. During breakfast he inquired about the rose garden. I told him that someone must have just been jealous of their beauty. "You can always plant new ones." I said innocently ending the conversation. On his way from the kitchen, he asked me if we could go for a walk after dinner that night. That is, of course, if I wasn't expecting a guest. I told him that I wasn't expecting anyone and that a walk would be nice.

That night after dinner, he asked me to come with him, that he needed to show me something. We walked outside, and I followed him to the pond behind my house. The water was hot from the summer air. We took off our shoes and slid our feet into the water. He loosened my barrette and began to comb out my hair with his finger tips. The sound of surrounding insects, singing their mating songs, soothed my tension and once more I was at his disposal. He softly spoke to me. "Eleanor, did you love your husband?"

"Yes" I quickly murmured.

"Eleanor, could you ever love another man?"

I felt trapped. "No" I replied nervously.

"Eleanor, do you love me?"

I shivered. "No, I do not love you, Eric." He kissed my hand and then pulled me up, holding me so tight, that my feet lost contact with the water. We both agreed that it was time to go back. On our way home, neither of us spoke a word. He walked me to the door, said goodbye, and then walked away.

The next morning during breakfast, he asked me again, "Eleanor, do you love me?"

"I'm sorry, Eric, but I could never love you."

"I replanted your roses early this morning."

"Oh really, well thank you. Maybe we should put up a fence to keep people out of them."

"Yes maybe. Eleanor, are you sure that you don't love me?"

"Yes Eric, I'm sure. In fact I'm very sure." He then finished his plate and left.

He did not show up that night for dinner. When I awoke, I found him in the den. Only now he wasn't the Eric I knew, not by appearance anyhow. He was so beautiful. He was clean and shaven. I could see his face, his true manly face. I wanted to run my fingers across his cheek, but I would never let myself succumb to these passions. He wasn't even wearing that raincoat. He interrupted my admiring. "Eleanor, I am going to leave for a while."

"Where are you going?" I asked half listening to him and half still absorbing this strange metamorphosis.

"I'm getting married."

"Are you crazy? Why?" I asked now that he had my full attention.

"I am doing this, Eleanor, because I want to be loved."

"But what about my gardens?"

"Eleanor, I will always love you, but I also need to be loved."

I was so outraged, but my foolish pride wouldn't give in. "You can't just leave like this. What about my flowers? Is the only person you care about yourself? Eric, what am I supposed to do about my flowers? Have you even thought about that? Have you even thought about me?"

"I'm really sorry, Eleanor, but you knew I could never wait for

you. You would never give in, would you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Me give in. Give in to what?"

"My love. If you couldn't love me openly before, you never would be able to."

"You are mad."

"Eleanor, I know you were the one who burned the roses, and I know you cooked that meal for me, but you could never tell anyone that you fell in love with your gardener now could you? You couldn't even admit it to yourself. And I also know about your husband."

"What are you talking about now?"

"You killed him, didn't you? He just never was quite perfect enough. But spiritually and emotionally I was, wasn't I Eleanor?"

"You're crazy. I loved my husband, and I've never loved you."

"I found the fresh grave along the woods, Eleanor. I know you did it."

"You don't know anything. You're nothing. Nothing but a low life bastard who lives off the handouts of poor, emotionally destitute, widows. You are nothing more than an epitome of self rot. Everything about your vile existence grates at my nerves. You disgust me."

He grasped me up close to him and kissed me really hard. So hard that I think for one second I must have let myself go. I was plunged into that infamous pit of passion. I hated him. Not because he was who he was, but because he knew who I was, and I hated myself. I pulled myself away and slapped him. I then ran to my upstairs bedroom, slamming the door behind me. I waited for him to come after me and tell me that it was all a big lie, and that he never planned to marry anyone, that he only loved me. But all I heard was the slam of a door and the car driving away. That was the end of it. He had to be stopped one way or another.

The next morning, I waited for him to come in for breakfast, and eventually he did. "So, when is the wedding going to be?" I asked him with a small smirk.

"The day after tomorrow."

"Oh, a Saturday wedding. Is she pretty?"

"Yes, but she could never be as beautiful as you, my dear Eleanor." I handed him his plate and walked out of the kitchen

into the den. I opened the top draw of my desk and pulled out a small handgun. I loved the way it felt in my hand.

"Eric, can you come here for a second please?" I asked eagerly. I heard the scrape of his chair across the floor. Then he was in the doorway. I sat down on the sofa and pulled the rocker in front of me, motioning for him to come and sit in it. He did. Our legs were just touching. I pulled out a book and read him Poe's "The Raven." After the poem, I asked Eric to leave me. As he walked away, I called out to him. That was when I fired the shot. Yes, I think I heard him say my name as he fell to the floor. He whispered, "Eleanor, my sweet Eleanor, do you love me?" His breath came out slow and effortless. "Yes, Eric, I loved you."

I pulled him into the rocker across from myself and went to sleep. When I awoke, my eyes were immediately met with Eric's. He looked like some grotesque demon dreaming.

I then got up and pushed the rocker to the back door, outside, and onto the edges of a plastic clothes bag I had arranged earlier. I pushed Eric's body out of the chair, into the bag, and zipped him up. He was a very heavy man, but I was able to drag him to the pond and into the boat. I vigorously paddled the boat to the center of the pond where I weighted the bag down and sank him to the bottom. As I paddled back to the shore, I screamed out the word, nevermore, over and over again. I then went back inside to get a glass of water.

Suddenly the doorbell rang. I ran to answer it. "Hello, are you Mrs. Eleanor Peterson?" the young man in front of me inquired.

"Why yes I am. And who might you be, sir?"

"The agency sent me over. They said that you phoned them a few days ago in need of a new gardener."

"Ah yes, come right in."



The First Generation (October 2205)

Amy Kitchens

"Doctor Beckim. Rodger!....Rodger!"

The young man by the window jumped, realizing that someone had been calling his name, and turned his head to see. His face was very solemn for any man his age. The eyes had lost their humor, his hair showed signs of frequent rumpling, and his over-all expression was severely lurid.

If one could catch even a glimpse of the world outside the window this man was gazing through, one would automatically understand his excuse for such gravity.

Looking down upon the city, he saw miles and miles of buildings stretched out on all sides. Most leapt hundreds of feet into the hazy-gray sky...the towers blocking out any chance of sunlight. This, of course, was only one unpleasant condition of a modern city one must grow accustomed to.

But the view from such an elevation cannot explain what could not yet be seen: There was something only a knowing mind could barely envision. Of course, even at this height there were indications of something terribly wrong--hints of a present abnormality.

Curling billows of dark smoke poured into the sky from small areas far below. Rodger Beckim was well aware that these black, fuzzy ribbons were the signs of "the mob," a demented horde of terrorists who unfortunately made up the world's majority. Only a few weeks ago, one of these spirals of smoke had taken root in his own home, forcing his family to take shelter in the basement of the Beckim Spaceport.

For as long as Rodger could remember, and as long as his father and his grandfather could remember, the mob had been there ready to destroy anything worth the love and care "nice people" could give. They had always kidnapped a couple's only child, or set fire to a retired woman's ancient house, or planted bombs in a new school built for a neighborhood that had needed it for so many years. Dr. Beckim was the kind of "nice person" who was a definite target. He was wealthy and hard-working with a small family and a good business that many hateful people would resent.

The voice that had been calling him once again interrupted his thoughts. "Rodger...it's about Terra."

Something sparkled behind Dr. Beckim's eyes. "In my office, Peter!" Rarely did Rodger's voice emote so much anticipation.

"The ship," began his colleague, "has been completed..." he held up his hand at Dr. Beckim's ready praise, "and tested." Peter leaned over the desk. "Rodger, it passed C maximum!"

"C maximum. Are you sure, Peter? They weren't gone that long."

"It's just like your theory. Just like it! At the speed of light, time seems normal to the passengers while decades are passing by down on Earth, but once you pass C maximum it's like...warping over time even though you're still moving through space."

Overwhelmed, Rodger leaned back in his chair and frowned. "What about 'the mob'? Did anyone notice anything different about that flight? If they found out, there could be trouble."

"It looked like an ordinary cargo flight to Columbus 4. Carson and I were the only ones to monitor...."

"Even though, we are going to have to move quickly with my plan." Dr. Beckim's fingers ran madly through his hair. "How many people will the ship carry?"

"About 120."

Rodger scratched his neck nervously. "That's only about twenty families. Can you start looking immediately? Make sure you know everything about them. These people will make up a whole new civilization. We can't afford to have even a spark of 'the mob' in them. Check their ethics and aptitude...and..," Dr. Beckim fiddled with a metal knob he had managed to knock off his desk and tried to reattach it.

"Rodger?"

Dr. Beckim looked up and tossed the knob into the waste basket under his desk. "Well, they have to be as perfect as possible. Keep an eye on Carson. See that he doesn't say too much."

Peter looked at his friend hopefully. "My family..."

"Of course! Yours and mine! How could I start a colony without your help?" Rodger sighed. "This world has gone haywire. I only pray that getting out while we can is the right resolution. We're coming to the end, Peter. It's the only way. Like a second Exodus."

May 3, 2206
Dear Diary,

We're almost there! I can't believe this is really happening! I can't believe that they chose my family to go! It's been over two weeks since we left.

I've made a lot of new friends, and I guess they'll be my friends for the rest of my life because we're going to be the only ones on the whole planet. I'm going to marry one of these guys. Daddy says I have to marry Adam in a couple of years. Adam is such an imp! He bothers me.

Among all my new friends, I guess Kathy and I have gotten along the best, although I do miss Jamie back on Earth. I miss a lot of things on Earth, but there are more things that I'm not sorry we left behind: That dingy old privy-camp and those awful noises outside. Mom and Dad were always worried, and we never got to see the sunshine. I'm very glad we're getting to live in a place with grass and trees and sunshine. I picture it to be like the garden of Eden, but I guess nothing will ever compare to that.

Well, everyone seems to be handling everything okay. I imagined that after eighteen days of being cramped up in a shuttle with twenty other families, people would start to get cranky and a little claustrophobic.

All the adults are working non-stop on the last-minute necessities. My mom is sewing a dress for me and practically memorizing a cookbook she copied down on coliff before we left (We couldn't bring anything with us from Earth). Mr. Mickelson and Daddy are going over how to build houses with Dr. Beckim, and all the other parents are wrapped up in either learning something or keeping their little kids away from the pilot's cabin.

We teenagers can always find something to talk about when we're not helping our parents or babysitting. There's not really that much else we can do, since we couldn't bring anything with us.

Dr. Beckim said that hundreds and hundreds of years from now, when our ancient things will be dug up and put into a museum, the scientists would be completely bewildered if they found a photograph or a wrist watch. It's supposed to be "beyond our technology."

About six months ago, we started learning how to survive on an untamed, unbroken planet that has never had to bear human beings before. Luckily, we all spoke the same language. We all moved to the lab building at the space port in Florida. For months,

we learned how to do things that have been forgotten for hundreds of years: Finding food, building houses, weaving material, making bricks, glass, pottery, metal.... We made clothes made from Terra's fibers for wearing before we left. We also made coliff, (or paper made from Terra's cole plant), which is what I'm writing on right now.

I'm going to tell you a secret: We were supposed to copy down whatever we wanted to bring along on coleff. I tried to copy the Bible, but there just wasn't enough time! I know it was wrong because Dr. Beckim said we weren't to bring *anything* at all, but I sneaked it in with my things when we got on board the shuttle. Maybe they won't find out. I just started thinking to myself, one night, how awful things would be without it after a while. I mean, that's part of what was wrong with Earth. Anything religious was outlawed. I was thinking that as soon as we got there, I could finish copying it down. I will do that--if it takes all my life!

Looking through my window, I can see clearly the star that will soon be our new sun. It will be only four more days, now. *We're almost there!!!*

Sincerely,
Bethany Harper

"Granma? What's this?" asked Kaylin. She had found the most extraordinary book she had ever seen. Its cover was deep red. The words inside were so neatly written, it was hard to believe a person could have printed them. There was a gorgeous drawing with life-like colors so realistic, it almost seemed as if it were alive. All the books Kaylin had seen had thick coleff or brown wood for covers and the letters inside were written in cursive or printed loosely, not even or straight as these. She had certainly never seen a painting like this before.

Kaylin had already read parts of it. It had explained how the world began and who the very first people were. She wondered if these people were Granma's grandparents.

It also had some confusing things about "Enos begat Cainan and Cainan begat Mahalaleel and Mahalaleel begat Jared" which confused Kaylin because she didn't know these people. Everyone that she had ever known had lived in the same town. There just wasn't anybody else.

She had skipped ahead after that and read about a city called Babel. That was when she decided to ask Granma about the book. Where were Babel and Eden and those other places? Who were all those people that were listed on the pages? Where are they?

"Granma...this is a pretty book."

The old lady stood up and took the book from the child. "What have you been into, Kaylin?" she snapped irritably. After seeing the little girl's startled expression she said more tenderly, "You must be very bored in this stale old house. Why don't you sit down here." She patted the arm of her chair. "Have you read any of it?"

Kaylin nodded, not sure whether or not she had done something wrong.

"How far have you gotten?"

"To the part about Babel. Granma, was Eve your Granma?"

"Oh, no dear! That was a long time ago."

"Who are all those people?"

"What people?"

"You know: Jared and Cainan and... Meal-a-heal.. and all those other people that begat?"

"They were people who lived a long, long time before I was born."

"Where are those people, now, Granma?"

The grandmother sighed. She hated to lie, but to tell the story of a long trip across the galaxy would only confuse the child. The girl knew only of horses and carts and boats and Pat Mickelson's one brown mule: How would she explain C maximum?

After telling her of a time when they had lived far across the ocean in a land called Babel and had been forced to leave, the grandmother shooed the girl home with a cookie and a kiss and told her not to worry about it.

The woman opened the book and looked at the first page. "Presented to bethany Harper" was printed at the top. Bethany took an ordinary brown book of coleff out of her desk drawer and, bending over it with a pen, wrote on the cover: **The Holy Bible**. There. It was finished. She hadn't thought about it in a while. She hated to give her old one up. It was the only thing she had to remind her of Earth. "Why would I want to remember?" she sighed and reluctantly, after a few minutes, tossed it into the fire. The other was put safely into a sealed box until it was meant to be found again.

The two men jumped off their horses and ran up to the temple gates. Laying their bows on the door step, they asked to see the priest, for they had something important to discuss with him.

In the priest's room, one of the men took an old brown book from his bag and put it on the priest's desk saying, "We were hunting in the forest this morning and found this among the ruins of an old village. It is a gift from heaven, I'm sure! Just read and you will see!"

The priest was slightly confused, but opened to the first page and began to read. The two men waited until the priest raised his head and exclaimed, "Surely this is the word of God! To see the history of Terra written down on paper: It's a miracle!"

First place short story
Copiah Academy

A Cave Adventure

Steven J. Vail

As the boy slowly wandered into the cave, it grew darker and darker. The bats suddenly frightened by his presence flew to another spot in the dark gloomy cave. He could hear the wind as it blew around the corners howling like a wolf. The water slowly dripping from the ceiling above made echoing sounds as they hit the puddles below on the floor. As he went deeper into the cave, a snake slithered out from behind a rock and into a crack in the wall. Huge spider webs stood before him like a big wall of fine silk, but the spiders that made them were nowhere to be seen. He slowly made his way through the giant webs. At the other side of them was a pit with what looked to be remains of many adventurers before him who were searching for their fame and glory but ended up with nothing.

The boy looked for a way around. There was a long root dangling from the ceiling just out of reach. The boy would have to make a daring leap to cross the pit. He gathered up all his courage and lunged for the dangling root. At the last possible minute he grabbed the root. As he hit the ground the root broke from the ceiling. Amazed by the obstacle he had overcome, he gave a cry of joy.

The path ahead was slender, crooked, and obstructed by fallen rocks. He carefully made his way over a large boulder trying not to slip. On the cave floor below there were rats. They scattered into cracks and crevices as he lowered himself down from the boulder.

The path became very small, at times he had to crawl on his hands and knees. He thought about turning back, but how would he cross the pit? He kept going; the path started to widen and straighten out. After about five minutes on the open path, he came to a big open place. There were bones and other items of no value. It seemed to be an ancient civilization that had been trapped alive in the cave with no way out. As he passed the remains, his thoughts turned to finding a way out. There were stone tools and pottery lying all around, but they were of no interest to him now. He came to a split in the path at the end of the open room. Which way to go now, to the left or to the right? The path to the left was narrow and twisted. The path to the right was wide and straight, which could be full of traps and danger. With this in mind he took the path to the left. The path took him further into the cave to an underground river with many large trout.

Getting hungry the boy sat on a rock to eat his lunch he had packed before he had left out on this adventure. It was getting late, and he knew then he MUST find a way out. He hurried up-stream thinking that he would find an opening so he could end this adventure. Ahead he could see the sunlight. But there was no light only lots of gold and jewels. He knew he must take something back for proof of his adventure. So he grabbed a handful of coins and a gold medallion with a ruby facing. Making his way still upstream the boy then sees....
(FORTY YEARS LATER)

"O.K. kids it's time to go to bed."

"But Mom, Grandpa was telling us a story."

"You can hear the rest of it tomorrow. Now come on it's time to go to bed."

"Grandpa, was that story really true?"

Pulling a shinny coin with a ruby-faced gem out of his pocket, he asked, "Well what do you think?"

Second place short story
Copiah Academy

The Bagel-Man of Berwyn

Joni Burda-Steinwinder

Cast:

TONY- An Italian Businessman who owns his own chain of pizza restaurants, a fleet of street pizza vendors, and is planning to expand to accommodate the influx of Jews by adding a fleet of bagel vendors and a, "Bagel Nosh" or two.

BERNARDO- Tony's friend, in love with Stephanie. The leader of the gang, "The Stallions."

LEON- Hangs out with Bernardo. A member of the gang, in love with Jessie.

GIOVANNI- Hangs out with Bernardo. A member of the gang

SAL- Stallion's gang member, works for Tony.

SONNY- Stallion's gang member, works for Tony.

STEPHANIE- An heiress to a Chicago tycoon's fortune.

RICHARD DONATTO- Stephanie's eccentric father.

MELISSA- Stephanie's best friend.

MR. BALTHASAR- Stephanie's family butler.

SCHLOCKMANN- The leader in the newly forming Jewish community. A business rival of Tony's, and generally dislikes the Italians.

JESSIE- Schlockmann's daughter, truly in love with Leon, a Catholic-Italian.

THE DUKE- Leader of the gang, "The Dukes of Earl."

THE CRIMSON CASANOVA- A rock singer and suitor of Stephanie's.

Favio, The Spanish Stud- A male-model, suitor of Stephanie's.

Setting:

This is a parody of William Shakespeare's, "The Merchant of Venice." It is set in Berwyn and Cicero, neighboring suburbs of Chicago. Cicero is known as the, "little Italy," of Chicago. Berwyn has been mostly Italian until recently, when it has been taken over by an influx of Jewish-Americans into the community.

Act I

Scene I

Interior, Tony's Pizza Palace.

TONY- (*Enters from back room carrying box of supplies, getting ready for the lunch-crowd. He's wearing an apron that*

reads, *"The Pizza-man."* Calls out to Sonny in the back.)

Hey, Sonny. Let's get a move on here. The lunch crowds gonna be here and we're not gonna be ready.

SONNY- (*Enters from back carrying box.*) Why you in such a bad mood lately? All you do is pout and moan, when you're not yelling.

TONY- If you worked as hard as I did you'd understand.

SONNY- That's what I mean, you have no life but work. When you gonna get a life?

TONY- When you get to work. (*laughs*) Where is that no-good friend of yours Sal? He's always late.

Enter Sal

SAL- (*Taking off jacket, grabbing an apron.*) Tony, I'm sorry I was running a little late. The guys were having a meeting on the courts. (*To Sonny*) We missed you there, it was a good game.

SONNY- Who won?

SAL- We did, 32 to 24.

TONY- Is that all you two do: talk, play ball and chase the girls?

SONNY- You know, Tony, you'd feel much better if you got out some of your frustrations on the court.

SAL- I don't think ball is the answer, I think Tony needs a love life.

SONNY- I don't know, what kind of girl would have him? (*teasing*) He's a grouch.

SAL- All he knows is work.

SONNY- You think with all the money he makes he could afford to hire some extra help and take a day off.

SAL- Tony wouldn't know what to do with a day off and he'd end up spending his time here.

TONY- (*interrupting*) Hey! Stop talking about me like I'm not here. I have Sunday off...

SAL- And where do you spend it?

SONNY- He's spends it praying!

TONY- Yeah, praying for your lazy souls!

SONNY- Hey, like we need your prayers.

TONY- You won't be saying that when you're out there with no jobs.

SAL- Seems we've heard that somewhere before, right Sonny.

SONNY- Yeah, Tony. You say that all the time, but do you ever fire us? No, and do you want to know why? Because you're a pushover.

SAL- Tony, you have a soft spot for us, admit it.

SONNY- He may have a soft spot for us, then what he has for Bernardo is a soft spot the size of a crater.

Enter Bernardo, Leon, and Giovanni

(all wear jackets with, "Stallions," on the back.)

SAL- Look who it is! *(to Tony)* It's our dear friend Bernardo.

SONNY- Come to ask some sort of favor, no doubt. *(teasing Tony)*

You have a spot of pizza sauce on your shirt, *(rubs an imaginary spot)* ..the size of a crater.

TONY- Don't you two have some pizzas to make in the kitchen?

Exit Sonny and Sal

TONY- Those two should be working as clowns at the circus. *(to Giovanni)* Were you boys looking for some lunch, then you've come to the right place?

GIOVANNI- No, Bernardo is looking for you.

TONY- Then, I suppose you have come to the right place, but no pizza?

LEON- I can't. I promised I'd work at the store today, so they'd let me have off tonight. I have BIG, *(makes a big gesture with his hands)* ..plans tonight.

TONY- Leonardo Gusconti, you are that merry wanderer of the night we only wish we could be.

GIOVANNI- He has a secret rendezvous with a mystery girl tonight. They are going to run off and get married. The only problem is her father, he's...

LEON- Hey, you're crazy. You don't know my business.

GIOVANNI- Are you kidding? I know everything !

BERNARDO- Giovanni, you know an infinite deal of nothing. Now, shut you're mouth before it gets you in trouble.

TONY- Come on boys, no squabbling in the restaurant, it's bad for business.

LEON- *(looks at watch)* I've got to run. *(to Bernardo)* Don't forget, you promised to meet me tonight.

BERNARDO- I promise and I'll bring it with me, now go on before you're late.

LEON- *(to Giovanni)* Come on, the least you can do is give me a ride.

GIOVANNI- All right. (*to Tony and Bernardo*) See you all later.

Exit Leon and Giovanni

TONY- (*sits down at a table*) So what brings you here if it's not my pizza?

BERNARDO- (*avoiding the real reason*) So, how's the business, Tony?

TONY- The business? You want to know how my business is? The business is fine, in fact, it's great. My restaurants in Cicero are doing really good, but the restaurants in Berwyn—they aren't doing so good.

BERNARDO- What's the problem?

TONY- Lotsa changes in Berwyn lately. It's no longer mostly Italians over there; it's almost all Jewish now. I need to change too, so I've invested in changing the restaurants.

BERNARDO- All of them?

TONY- Just five to start. The ones in Cicero will stay the same, and this one since it's right on the line will serve as my main office, but the five in Berwyn are going kosher.

BERNARDO- Tony, that's crazy—kosher pizza.

TONY- No, I'm opening them as, "Bagel Noshes."

BERNARDO- Excuse me for being a little blunt, Tony: what the hell is a "Bagel Nosh?"

TONY- Eh, it's like a donut shop only they sell all kinds of bagels and all the stuff that goes with them.

BERNARDO- I guess I can see it. (*noticing his apron*) I guess we'll have to get you an apron that says, "The Bagel-Man." (*both laugh*)

TONY- So what really brings you here? Not the business endeavors of a crazy old man.

BERNARDO- You know me so well, Tony.

TONY- As if you were my own son. So, what's the problem?

BERNARDO- Tony, you know you do so much for me and I really appreciate everything. I want you to know someday when I make it, I'm gonna pay you back everything—with interest.

TONY- Hey, don't worry, I know you're good for it; besides, I never take no interest, you know that.

BERNARDO- Yeah, you're the best, Tony. I need to ask another favor. This time it's a sure thing and I'll be able to pay you back everything I owe you. You see, I got this letter the other

day. *(pulls a letter out of his jacket, gives it to Tony)* It's an invitation to Stephanie Donetto's, you've heard about her, she's the daughter of Richard Donetto, of Donetto Productions. He started off in game-shows and worked his ways into owning the largest network in Chicago.

TONY- How'd you meet a girl like that?

BERNARDO- At a club in Chicago the guys all went to last month. We danced and I think she really liked me. She had a friend that Giovanni talked to and I found out her father's got this sort of test you have to take before you can date her. I guess to see if you're good enough. *(notices Tony's reaction)* Relax, Tony, this is the 90's; it's not unusual today to be asked for medical records before you can go out with someone. I'm lucky all her father wants is a simple test of the wits. What's the matter, don't you think I can win her with my wits? Stephanie's warm and sweet and she's got one of those faces, Tony, like an angel.

TONY- So she invited you? *(handing him the letter)*

BERNARDO- The letter is signed only, "M." But, I'm sure it's Stephanie that wants me there.

TONY- How are you so sure? A girl like that probably dates movie stars.

BERNARDO- I know, there was this feeling that was so real between us. Everyone on the dance floor could see it.

TONY- Listen to a man who's lived a little longer. It doesn't matter what everyone else sees, what's important is what she sees.

BERNARDO- Then, I have nothing to worry about; this kind of... *(pauses looking for the word)*

TONY- .. Love, Bernardo?

BERNARDO- Between you and me, Tony: Yeah.. I think I'm in love.

TONY- Then, I am behind you in whatever it is you want to do.

BERNARDO- I'm going to Stephanie's tonight. I have to get there and win her father's favor before someone else can. But, I'm going to need your help.

TONY- Whatever I have is yours.

BERNARDO- I need to borrow your car: the Cadillac, Tony. And I need to borrow enough money to make myself look impressive for her father.

TONY- *(uncomfortable)* Oh.

BERNARDO- This time I'll be able to pay you back.

TONY- It's not that, Bernardo. It's that I don't have what you need

anymore. The Cadillac's gone, I sold it to the bank this morning for collateral for the renovations at the restaurants; and the money's all tied up in the new stock. It takes a lot of money to transform five pizza palaces into kosher deli's. I'm sorry, I wish things weren't changing so much in Berwyn and I didn't have to be in this bind. *(in a more enthusiastic tone)* I tell you what I'm gonna do, you go to the bank or whatever and borrow the money—whatever you need, and I'll sign the note. I'm good for it, I'm not fortune's fool; within three weeks time the money will be rolling in the new stores and I'll have enough money to pay your note and mine in three-fold.

Bernardo, I'm a great believer in love and a great believer in you. So, go and do whatever it is you need to do, and I hope love comes like sunshine after rain. Hey, would anyone ever believe that a romantic lived in such a tired old man's body?

BERNARDO- Then I'd better hurry, tonight's a big night for me and Leo...

TONY- A big night for you and who else, Bernardo?

BERNARDO- Tonight is a big night for love, Tony.

Exit Bernardo

Scene 2

(lights dim at Tony's, lights stage-right come up on a street sign reading, "Commerce St./ Berwyn Blvd.")

SCHLOCKMANN- *(under the street-sign, reading off figures in a ledger to himself)* \$10,575. How can that be? \$425! *(flips through some pages)* Ah, here it is, she forgot to mark in my deposit Wednesday. That's what I get from keeping my money in a lousy Italian bank, I should keep it at home under my bed—I'd be better off.

(looks at his watch) Where is he? I can't wait all day, time is money.

Enter Bernardo

BERNARDO- Mr. Shlockmann. Hey, thanks for waiting.

SCHLOCKMANN- I never walk away from a chance to make some quick money, young man.

BERNARDO- Then you've been by the bank?

SCHLOCKMANN- ...And my lawyer's. I had the proper papers drawn up. (*pats his coat pocket*)

BERNARDO- You see, I need to borrow \$30,000.

SCHLOCKMANN- Um, —\$30,000.

BERNARDO- Just for three weeks.

SCHLOCKMANN- Um,—Only three weeks.

BERNARDO- ..And Tony will sign the note.

SCHLOCKMANN- And Signor Tony will be responsible for the debt. —
Um.

BERNARDO- Than we have a deal?

SCHLOCKMANN- Is Tony coming here to sign the note, so I can perhaps talk to him and negotiate our deal?

BERNARDO- He said he would meet me here. (*Indicating off, stage right*) Here he comes now.

Enter Tony

TONY- Hello, Bernardo.

BERNARDO- Tony, this is, Signor Samuel Schlockmann.

TONY- Yes, I know Mr. Schlockmann.

SCHLOCKMANN- Yes, he knows me, although he calls me by other names than my given Jewish name.

TONY- Sir?

SCHLOCKMANN- Yes, you have ignored me before and called me a dog; referring to me as a modern Shylock; and yet sir, you come to me wishing my money, my help. Jews are not the villains, we are God's heroes in the Scriptures, the chosen people, not the Italians.

TONY- You have been less than a fair businessman in the past, my thoughts of you are not unfounded. I have reason to say you are a villain with a smiling face and like the bad apple are rotten to the heart. Even the devil can bend scripture to his own advantage.

SCHLOCKMANN- And anyone can quote Shakespeare and sound learned: but are you a man of your words, or are they just empty tries at intelligence?

TONY- What do you mean Anthony Scarpachi is not a man of his word? He has been and will always remain a man bound

by his word.

SCHLOCKMANN- Then, I propose we seal this deal on a little wager, since you are such a learned Shakespearean-man.

TONY- Spell it out, what is the deal?

SCHLOCKMANN- That if the note isn't returned as promised, in three weeks time than you will, as your friend, William Shakespeare suggested, surrender to me one pound of your flesh, to be cut off where I please.

TONY- It will never have to come to that.

BERNARDO- That's crazy, Tony, you said yourself the new restaurants probably won't see a profit for three weeks! You can't pin something like this on a maybe.

TONY- (*to Bernardo*) Don't worry, I'll have the money; my ship will be in: in three weeks.

SCHLOCKMANN- Then we have a deal?

TONY- You are a crazy man and I must be crazy to agree to this; but, it will work out in our favor and you will be nothing but a crazy loser.

SCHLOCKMANN- (*takes out papers and has Tony sign, gives an envelope of money to Bernardo*)

*Lights dim on street sign and the lights come up on the stoop.
Enter Bernardo.*

BERNARDO- (*looking at his watch*) Come on, Leon, let's get this show on the road. I've got to look like a million bucks by this evening and...

Enter Leon and Giovanni

LEON- Bernardo, did Tony give you the money?

BERNARDO- Not exactly, he signed a note for it. I had to borrow it from...

LEON- ...A bank.

BERNARDO- No, not a bank.

GIOVANNI- Not a loan-shark!

BERNARDO- Not really.

GIOVANNI- If it wasn't a bank and it wasn't a loan-shark, then what—did you steal it?

BERNARDO- Giovanni! You know me better than that, I borrowed the money from Mr. Schlockmann.

GIOVANNI- Schlockmann!

LEON- Oh! Bernardo, you may as well have got it from one of the
Mafioso loan-sharks in Cicero; Schlockmann is no better.

GIOVANNI- Please, *(to Leon)* ..don't give the Sicilians such a bad
name.

LEON- Pardon me..*(to Giovanni)* ..I forgot, you are part Sicilian. *(to
Bernardo)* Schlockmann is a shark of the same nature, the
only difference is he chums with kosher meat.

BERNARDO- I wouldn't worry about Schlockmann's money or the
crazy terms of his deal. Tony said he'd have the money in
three weeks to cover the note in case my plan doesn't
work. So we are covered two ways; Tony is a solid tax-
paying businessman with a good business that's fixing to
get even better and my plan is fool-proof. What could go
wrong?

LEON- Well, I just don't trust Schlockmann. Jessie is his own
daughter and even she can't stand him.

BERNARDO- Hey! All this doom and gloom—I don't want to hear it.
Tell me your plan Leon.

LEON- Jessie's meeting me here any time now and we're off to the
big city to get married. Whoever thought I, LEONARDO
GUSCONTI, would be happily married?

BERNARDO- To Schlockmann's daughter, with the courtesy of his
money, no less. *(reaches in his pocket and hands Leon
some money)* Here's \$2,000, go and rent a car—a limou-
sine, and what ever is left consider it our wedding gift.

LEON- I don't know what to say! You're a good friend. Thanks. *(puts
money away)*

BERNARDO- *(to Giovanni)* We have a lot to do, we need a car,
clothes, and reservations at The Ritz. This night will see us
all better men.

Enter Jessie

JESSIE- Leon!

LEON- Jessie! Thank God, you got away all right?

JESSIE- Without a hitch! *(to Bernardo and Giovanni)* Hey guys! *(to
Leon)* He had left on business with Mr. Tubal and I packed
what I could carry—and what cash he had in the safe.
(shows him a bag full of money)

LEON- Oh my God!

BERNARDO- That will start you two on a good foot, if you start now.

GIOVANNI- Get a move on and stay one step ahead of him!

BERNARDO- Good luck you two. (*kisses Jessie's cheek*)

JESSIE- I don't think we'll ever be back here again.

BERNARDO- Well, wherever it is we meet, I hope it will be under only the best of circumstances.

LEON- Good-bye!

BERNARDO- Good-bye!

Exit Leon and Jessie

BERNARDO- Giovanni, come on, we are going to seek our fortune further than at home tonight.

Exit Bernardo and Giovanni

Scene 3

Richard Donatto's study

This set is made hiding Tony's. It is made with flats decorated to be a very rich study. There is a desk and two chairs, there doesn't need to be a chair behind Donatto's desk, as he is in a wheel-chair. On the left side of his office is a richly embroidered curtain that has a pedestal with a gold bar on it, behind the curtain. Next, there is a door, oak, very solid a rich-looking; behind it is a fun-house type mirror that contorts the image. Lastly on the left, next to the desk is a simple small brown box on a pedestal, under it is a single rose and a locket that says, Stephanie.

STEPHANIE- Melissa, I'm so sick of all this. I wish I were just a normal girl with a normal father who asks to meet your boyfriend before a date, not his strange test he puts every guy I bring home through. As it is, I'd rather not meet men and stay home watching old movies, than go through this ordeal.

MELISSA- But, Steph, you know he does it for your own good, to protect you from men who only want your money and wouldn't know a true feeling if it were smothering them. (*Indicating the curtain, the door, and the box*) Your father is really a genius. The way he has this set up, it weeds out any guy that's here only for his own gain.

STEPHANIE- I know—You're right, but still I just want the feeling of being in love again. I still think of the boy we met that night

we slipped away to go dancing. Remember? (*daydreaming*)

MELISSA - Yeah, I remember.. (*aside*) ..more than you know.

STEPHANIE - At that dance I noted his face in my book of memory and I can still remember everything about him. Melissa, I wish Bernardo was here.

MELISSA - Maybe you'll have your wish—I've always believed in true love.

Enter Donatto, in wheel-chair, pushed by Mr. Balthasar

Donatto - Good afternoon, Stephanie.. (*to Melissa*) ... Melissa.

Balthasar - (*wheels Donatto behind the desk*) Will there be anything else right now?

Donatto - No, you may bring in the first gentleman.

Balthasar - (*aside*) ..If you can call him that. (*exits*)

Donatto - There are two gentleman waiting to see you. Balthasar will bring in the first one now.

Enter Balthasar with The Crimson Casanova, who is dressed outlandishly in a crimson costume.

Balthasar - (*giving a formal introduction*) Sir, may I present, The Crimson Casanova.

Crimson - (*holding out his hand to Donatto*) Hey, dude.

Balthasar - (*clears his voice, almost laughing*) Anything else, sir?

Donatto - No, I'll call you when we're ready. (*to Crimson*) What is it you like to be called?

Crimson - The Crimson Casanova is my stage-name, but you can call me Crimson—or Casanova, either will be fine. I'm sure you've heard of us; we're all over MTV and we just finished our second U.S. tour.

Donatto - Actually, sir, I have a reasonable good ear in music; but, I'm afraid I've never heard of you.

Crimson - No problem, pops. You're just a little behind the times. I'm sure the dudettes over there have heard of me.

Donatto - Well, no doubt you have heard of our small test you must pass, in order to seek the attentions of my daughter, or else you would not be here.

Crimson - Yeah, I've heard. It's a little strange if you ask me, but, a man with your kind of money can afford to be a little

eccentric.

Donatto- Yes, well, a man in my position must do everything to secure my daughter's future, upon my eminent departure.

Crimson- Morbid, dude.

Donatto- Would you like to chose the curtain, the door, or the box. One of these three holds a representative token of the wealth, prestige, and everything that will be yours if you win the chance to court Stephanie. You see, it is my hopes to see Stephanie successfully married before I die. Therefore, as her husband, you would jointly have my fortune. Are you ready?

Crimson- No time like the present, pops. (*looks over the three choices*) Well, seeing as you' re a mondo importante' guy, I don't think you could fit a representation of all that moola behind a closet door, or especially, under a small brown box. So, dude, I pick the curtain.

Stephanie and MELISSA- (*Smiling*) Good choice.

Donatto- (*pushes a button on his desk, the curtain opens revealing the pedestal with the gold brick*)

Crimson- (*walks over to the gold brick*) Money, but no mention of the girl? (reaches out to touch it and receives a shock) Hey!

Donatto- You chose wrong, you see, all that glistens is not gold. Money is nothing without true love. (*calls out to Balthasar*) Mr. Balthasar.

Balthasar- (enters) Yes, sir?

Donatto- You may see out Mr. Crimson.

MELISSA- (*to Stephanie*) There goes another loser.

STEPHANIE- Good riddance.

Crimson exits

Balthasar- Would you like me to send in the next, sir?

Donatto- Yes, Mr. Balthasar. (*Balthasar exits*)

Balthasar enters with, Favio, The Spanish Stud, dressed as if he walked in, off the cover of, Gentleman's Quarterly.

Balthasar- (*introducing him*) Sir, may I present Favio, The Spanish Stud.

FAVIO- (*holds out his hand to Donatto*) Charmed, I'm sure. (*pulls his hand back and runs it through his hair, tossing his head*)

back.)

DONATTO- Certainly, you would prefer to be called, Favio, rather than the rest of that ludicrous title.

FAVIO- Favio is fine, the rest is a title given to me by, People Magazine, when I was voted one of "The 10 Sexiest Men in America."

DONATTO- Then I'm sure you know my daughter Stephanie and me; and of our little formality of determining the suitability of those seeking her attentions?

FAVIO- Yes, I do. You are Richard Donatto, the television and movie producer extraordinaire, who got his start in game-shows. Could we get on with this? I have a shoot at three.

DONATTO- By all means.

STEPHANIE- *(to Melissa)* Please, the quicker to choose, the quicker to be gone.

FAVIO- *(looking over the three choices)* Let me see. It seems you are a very clever man, Mr. Donatto. I don't think it stands to reason you would be so bold as to put the prize behind the biggest, most obvious place. *(indicating the curtain, now shut)* Nor, are you so gauche as to put it under a pauper's box, so I chose the door because a clever man would know that behind it is not a closet, but a room full of riches.

Stephanie and MELISSA- *(to each other)* Good choice!

FAVIO- *(opens the door and sees his reflection in the fun-house mirror, horribly contorted)* Oh!! This is a joke! *(to Donatto)* Are you trying to make a fool of me?

DONATTO- Sir, you have done that quite well on your own. *(to Balthasar)* Mr. Balthasar, will you come see Mr. Favio out?

FAVIO- No need. I can see my own way out.

Favio exits as Balthasar enters.

BALTHASAR- There are two gentleman who just came from Cicero to see Miss Stephanie.

STEPHANIE- *(to Melissa)* Could it be, Bernardo?

MELISSA- *(aside)* ..And Giovanni?

DONATTO- I don't know, I am rather tired..

STEPHANIE- Please, Father, may we see them?

DONATTO- Oh, all right. *(to Balthasar)* Show them in.

Balthasar exits, then re-enters with Bernardo and Giovanni, dressed very tastefully chic.

Balthasar- Sir, may I present, Bernardo Montague and Giovanni Baglioni of Cicero.

BERNARDO- (*smiling at Stephanie, he goes over to shake Donatto's hand, never taking his eyes off her*) Hello, sir. It is very nice to meet you. I have heard many good things about you and your family. Thank you for seeing us.

GIOVANNI- (*interrupting*) My friend is a bit overwhelmed by your lovely daughter, may I just say, sir, it is a honor to be here.

BERNARDO- (*blushing*) Yes, it is, sir.

Donatto- Well, I think I am very pleased, also, to have you here. (*indicates Stephanie*) Have you two met before?

BERNARDO- Ah, yes...(*nervously*) Uh.. in my fondest dreams.

MELISSA- (*aside quietly*) Good answer.

Donatto- Have you heard of my little prerequisite to seeking my daughter's attentions?

BERNARDO- Yes, sir, I have.

Donatto- And you agree?

BERNARDO- Yes, sir, I do think it is very wise that you be so careful for Stephanie's future.

Donatto- Will the two of you be trying?

GIOVANNI- Oh, no, sir. I am here for moral support. (*looking at Melissa*) And—the lovely view.

Donatto- (*to Bernardo*) Then are you ready to make your choice?

BERNARDO- Yes, sir.

MELISSA- (*interjecting*) May I say one small thing, sir? (*to Bernardo*) It is very plain to see that Bernardo is, by far, the best man. I'd simply like to say, good luck.

Donatto- (*to Bernardo*) Your choice?

BERNARDO- (*looking at the three choices*) Well—(*goes to the curtain*) My feelings are certainly grand, but, they go much deeper than these fancy facades. (*goes to the door*) And this looks like a very solid choice, but...(*walks over to the box*) I am going to choose this small box because it reminds me of what I come here with. (*to Stephanie*) These clothes, the fancy car, and everything are all in the hopes of impressing your father; all I have to offer you, Stephanie, is my heart.

Donatto- (*enthusiastically*) Good choice!! (*calls for Balthasar*)

Balthasar, please come in here.

Balthasar- (*enters*) Yes, sir?

Donatto- Young Bernardo, has chosen the box, please show him what he has picked.

Balthasar- Your choice, sir. (*picks up the box to uncover the rose and the locket*) Congratulations.

BERNARDO- (*to Stephanie*) You mean I've chosen right?

Donatto- Yes. Balthasar, let's leave the youngsters alone.

Balthasar- Yes, sir. (*wheels Donatto out, both exiting*)

Donatto- I am very pleased that you picked well, Bernardo.

Exit Donatto and Balthasar

STEPHANIE- (*hugs Bernardo*) I'm so happy. I never thought I'd see you again, I must have a fairy-godmother or something.

GIOVANNI- (*to Melissa*) ...or something.

MELISSA- (*whispers in Giovanni's ear*) Shall we tell them?

GIOVANNI- Why not?

MELISSA- (*to Stephanie and Bernardo*) We have some good news to share. Giovanni and I, sort of corresponded since we all met, and this meeting was not all by chance. It was arranged with the hopes you two would get together, so that Giovanni and I, could also be together.

STEPHANIE- (*to Melissa*) I'm so happy for you—for all of us. (*picks up the locket, gives it to Bernardo*) This is very special to me, my mother gave it to me. Please always keep it close to you, to remind you of how special we are to each other.

BERNARDO- (*takes it and puts it around his neck*) I will and I'll never take it off. I promise.

MELISSA- (*takes a locket out of her pocket, gives it to Giovanni*) Here. I had this made for you, see (*opens it*) ... it has our names inside. Please, always keep it with you.

GIOVANNI- (*he puts it on his neck*) I'll never take it off. I promise.

Balthasar enters

Balthasar- Excuse me, Miss Stephanie, there is a urgent telegram for Bernardo. (*hands it to her*)

STEPHANIE- (*takes the telegram*) Thank you, Balthasar. (*she gives it to Bernardo*) What does it say?

BERNARDO- (*reads the telegram*) Oh, no. I must get back to Cicero

immediately. My friend Tony is in serious trouble because of me. *(to Stephanie)* You see, he signed the note for the money I borrowed to come here. The man who lent the money hates Tony and would like nothing but to collect in default on the loan.

STEPHANIE- What do you owe if you default?

BERNARDO- Schlockmann had this crazy idea that since Tony takes such pleasure in calling him a Shylock, that he should collect a pound of Tony's flesh.

GIOVANNI- Bernardo, that's crazy! How could you let him?

BERNARDO- He said he'd surely have the money in three weeks.

MELISSA- Then, what happened?

BERNARDO- It says that the IRS came and locked his business. They have reason to believe he owes big on back taxes. Until they finish the audit, all his assets are frozen. Schlockmann is going to collect at sundown. *(looks at watch)* It's three now. We have to hurry.

STEPHANIE- Do you need the money to pay him back?

BERNARDO- I wouldn't ask if it weren't such an extreme situation, but could I?

STEPHANIE- How much did you borrow?

BERNARDO- \$30,000.

STEPHANIE- That's no problem. *(takes a check-book out of desk)* I can write you a check to get that vulture, Schlockmann off your back. Here. This will cover it three times over. *(she hands him a check)* Hurry. You don't have any time to lose.

BERNARDO- What about you two?

STEPHANIE- We'll wait here. *(they kiss)*

Exit Bernardo and Giovanni

STEPHANIE- *(Calls Balthasar on house phone)* Balthasar... *(looks at the telegram)* I need you to speak to Sal or Sonny at Tony's Pizza Palace and find out the specifics of what's going on at sundown between Schlockmann and Tony. Let me know right away. *(hangs up)*

MELISSA- We aren't going to wait here for them, are we?

STEPHANIE- Are you kidding? We're going to be there and they'll never know it. *(picks up phone and calls Balthasar back)* We're going to need the car brought around and I need you to find me two authentic police uniforms in size 6. You

can give me the specifics on the way.

MELISSA - You ready?

STEPHANIE - Let's go!

Exit Stephanie and Melissa

Scene 4

The basketball court, a favorite hang-out of the gangs

SONNY - Hey, Tony, I still say we ought to leave town—just for awhile, till this all blows over.

SAL - Bernardo will be home soon. I just know he wouldn't leave you out to dry.

TONY - Antonio Scarpachi doesn't run from anything: his debts, his problems, and not from a tyrannical Jew.

THE DUKE - What's going on here, brothers?

SAL - *(to The Duke)* We have a problem; Tony needs your help, Schlockmann is gonna carve him up like a Christmas ham if we don't find a way around this contract. You know Tony and Bernardo, they've always been good to you and your gang, please help. You're the leader of the most respected gang, surely you can do something.

THE DUKE - No problem, Bro. I'll help.

SONNY - *(to Sal)* I called Leon, he'll be here. Tony needs all the support he can get.

Enter Schlockmann, carrying a meat scale.

SCHLOCKMANN - Are you ready, Tony. The note is defaulted and I am ready to collect. *(pulls out a Swiss pocket knife)* Oh! Would you have preferred a butcher knife or a cleaver? I prefer this. It is smaller ..more exact.

Enter Bernardo, Giovanni, and The Duke.

BERNARDO - I'm back, Tony, and I have the money for the note.

TONY - Thank, God! *(to Schlockmann)* See! I knew I would be able to make your note. Bernardo has saved the day.

SCHLOCKMANN - But not your hide. Your hide is mine.

BERNARDO - I have the money! I have what I borrowed, plus the interest.

SCHLOCKMANN - That's not what we agreed, signed and witnessed.

See! (*holds up the paper*) You signed it, Antonio, it is past the agreed time: you are in default. I will take the collateral: what you put up against the note. Your flesh, Antonio.

GIOVANNI- You're crazy, Schlockmann!

SAL- Yeah, crazier than a march hare.

SONNY- How does he think he can get away with this?

SCHLOCKMANN- With this! (*waving the papers*)

THE DUKE- Hold it. These are my courts and there ain't no blood shed here, less I says.

SCHLOCKMANN- I know who you are. (*trying to win him*) You are the strongest leader of the most powerful gang. Are you a man who believes in the law? In a man being bound by his word? (*shaking the papers*) And isn't a man's signature as good as his word?

THE DUKE- Yes that's all right, but...

SCHLOCKMANN- But, what? If you are a man of your word, shouldn't they be also?

BERNARDO- But, I have the money.

THE DUKE- (*to Schlockmann*) He has the money.

SCHLOCKMANN- (*to The Duke*) It's too late.

BERNARDO- I have twice over what I borrowed.

SCHLOCKMANN- Sorry. Nothing in the contract says doubling the amount due will exempt you from the penalties.

TONY- (*to Bernardo*) Stop fighting him, give him what he wants. Nothing you offer him less than my blood will appease him.

(*to Schlockmann*) Just get it over with.

Enter Stephanie and Melissa, dressed as two policemen.

STEPHANIE- (*dressed as male police officers, flashes her badge*) — Hold it. We've been watching here and it looks like trouble. I'm Officer Balthasar and this is Officer Bellario.

MELISSA- (*flashes a badge*)—Evening.

STEPHANIE- What's the problem here?

SCHLOCKMANN- There is no problem, Officer Balthasar. I have come here to collect what is owed me upon default of this note. (*gives her the papers*) See, it is written in plain English, signed and witnessed.

STEPHANIE- It looks like it's legal. So, according to this he defaults if the note isn't paid by sundown today?

SCHLOCKMANN- Yes, sir.

STEPHANIE- And was it?

SCHLOCKMANN- No, sir, the note is in default, as of three hours ago.

BERNARDO- But, I have the money, twice over what he's asking. If he wants more, I can get that too.

STEPHANIE- (*to Schlockmann*) You won't be merciful and take that, Schlockmann? You know mercy is something that every man needs to show and to be shown once in a while.

SCHLOCKMANN- That's not what it says in the contract, that's the law. You are a man of the law. I am a man who wants to adhere to the very letter of the law. (*indicates the papers*) This is the law.

STEPHANIE- Well then... I see that Schlockmann must be right.

Schlockmann - Yes! Finally a just man. (*to Tony*) Today, Daniel, you go to your judgment.

TONY- Please, get it over with.

SCHLOCKMANN- (*taking out his knife*) This will make up nicely for everything and all those years of being below you. Today, I rise above.

STEPHANIE- Wait a minute. You mean to cut him? (*takes the papers*) Let me read that again. There is nothing here that allows for bloodshed. If you can take what you require without spilling his blood, then you should be a surgeon, not a banker. Besides, it is against the statutes of Chicago, to take any part of a living man. And with this knife, could you carve exactly what you need? No more, no less? If not, you would be at fault in the very words of your own contract.

THE DUKE- And it's against the law here, on our turf, to try and do away with one of our own.

STEPHANIE- So, Mr. Schlockmann, what will it be? Are you going to pay the price of taking your note according to your contract, or would you like to rethink? Think of your choices: jail or whatever The Duke's gang deems fair.

SCHLOCKMANN- I see. Maybe I'll just take the money Bernardo's brought. It's not like I don't need it since my daughter saw fit to clean the house and the safe.

Enter Leon and Jessie

LEON- Tony! Are you all right?

TONY- It looks as if I may be.

JESSIE - I'm so sorry my father could've ever put you through this.
SCHLOCKMANN - Jessica, you came back, for what? To drive the last screw in my coffin?

JESSIE - (*to her father*) I'm so embarrassed to be related to you.

SCHLOCKMANN - You're breaking your father's heart.

JESSIE - What heart?

STEPHANIE - I think we need to re-examine the situation, Schlockmann.
(*to Melissa*) Loan-sharking is quite illegal.

MELISSA - Or intent to do bodily harm with a Swiss pocket knife.

STEPHANIE - I would hate to have to throw you in jail, but even worse might be leaving you here at the mercy of Tony's friends. I don't think people around here take very well to someone hurting thier own. So why don't you act like a human being and back off?

SCHLOCKMANN - No, I'll leave quietly. I'll go away like nothing ever happened: no notes, no money, no anything. Okay. We can just forget all this, all right?

STEPHANIE - What'll it take to forget all this. (*to Melissa*) What do you think?

MELISSA - Definitely an apology.

STEPHANIE - Most definitely and I think he ought to drop any charges he has against his daughter. In fact, I think, he ought to make her and her new husband his new pet charity project.

SCHLOCKMANN - Oh, I will.

MELISSA - We'll need that in writing.

STEPHANIE - Signed and witnessed.

SCHLOCKMANN - Of course!

STEPHANIE - Well then, our works done here.

MELISSA - (*to Stephanie*) We still have some loose ends though.

STEPHANIE - (*to Schlockmann*) Wait over there by the big black car. The man inside is an undercover officer, his name is Balthasar, too—an uncle of mine. He'll have you sign the necessary papers. Go on.

Exit Schlockmann

BERNARDO - I don't know how to thank you two.

TONY - Me either. You have saved my life. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Exit Tony

STEPHANIE- All in the line of duty. *(to Bernardo)* I noticed that locket you're wearing, it's lovely. It's a one of a kind?

BERNARDO- Yes, my girlfriend had it made for me—special.

MELISSA- *(to Giovanni)* And yours, it is also lovely.

STEPHANIE- I would love to give one like that to my wife.

MELISSA- *(to Giovanni)* And I, too, would like one for my wife.

BERNARDO- I really couldn't.

STEPHANIE- Not even for saving your friend?

BERNARDO- She made me promise.

STEPHANIE- Certainly she would understand?

BERNARDO- Oh—I guess she would. *(gives Stephanie the locket)*

GIOVANNI- Bernardo, she'll never forgive you.

MELISSA- *(to Giovanni)* I'm sure she will and yours will too when you explain how it saved your friend's life.

GIOVANNI- I hope she will. *(gives Melissa the locket)*

STEPHANIE- Well, we have to go. You know, reports to file.

Melissa - Good evening.

STEPHANIE- Good evening.

Exit Stephanie and Melissa

BERNARDO- What are we going to tell them?

GIOVANNI- The truth.

BERNARDO- Somehow, I don't even think the truth will save us.

Enter Tony, Sonny and Sal

TONY- I came back to say thank you again. I can't believe Schlockmann thought he could get away with that.

SONNY- But, it looks like everyone's better off, look at Leon and Jessie, they are!

SAL- I've got some news. A letter came for you, Tony. They finished the audit, you're free and clear.

TONY- Oh my goodness, that on top of Schlockmann letting me go: A good deed in a bad world, doesn't it shine!

BERNARDO- I'm just so relieved it all worked out.

Enter Stephanie and Melissa, dressed as themselves.

STEPHANIE- Bernardo, I was so worried about you, I had Balthasar drive us.

TONY- (*aside*) That name is very familiar tonight.

MELISSA- Giovanni, did you miss me? (*looking inside his shirt*)
Where is your locket?

STEPHANIE- And where is yours, Bernardo?

BERNARDO- Stephanie, I gave it to the police officer who saved Tony.
He admired it and would only take only it as a token of our gratitude.

GIOVANNI- That's true, Melissa! And he was a tough guy. Who was I to say no to him?

MELISSA- This officer was so tough he scared you into breaking your promise to me?

STEPHANIE- These poor boys! (*to Melissa*) Shall we tell them?

MELISSA- Why not? (*they both pull out the locket, along with their fake badges*)

BERNARDO- It was you two?

GIOVANNI- You saved Tony, you faced Schlockmann and outwitted him?

STEPHANIE- Yes. What have you got to say, Bernardo.

BERNARDO- I truly won a prize when I picked you.

MELISSA- And you, Giovanni, what have you got to say.

GIOVANNI- It'll be a cold day in hell when they can pry this locket from my fingers again.

The End

Second place MCCCWA

Second place Southern Literary Festival

Writing: Another Way to Touch People

Ann Heaton Hawkins

In 1992 I left my career as a banker to become a full-time speaker and consultant. I felt an extreme urge to touch the lives of those around me through the spoken word. And, speak I did at a fast pace during those early months in business.

However, as time passed, I felt that there needed to be more. I needed something to leave behind as I left those audiences each time. So, with a rough idea in my mind, I set out to publish my first book, *The Gifts of Christmas*.

The original idea came in the form of a speech. I needed something to offer people during the holiday season, and the gifts were a "gift" to me to share with others. After organizing my thoughts, I realized that once again, I needed a way to leave people with something when my speech was done.

I sat down at the typewriter and began to compose the manuscript which would eventually become part of the printed pages of my book. After painstaking writing, re-writing, illustrating and arranging, the book finally came off the press. I felt as though I had given birth to my first child.

Throughout that first Christmas season I travelled untold hundreds of miles giving my speech and selling my book to all sorts



Ann Hawkins

of people from Mississippi to Wisconsin. Afterwards, I think that the greatest reward for me was to discover how much those printed words meant to those who read them.

The world is starving for a message of hope and, those of us who are able to share the message need to busy ourselves and do so. I shared that hope with countless hundreds of people that year. And, do you know what? The book continues to touch lives day after day, year after year.

Writing, as well as speaking, are tools which I use to reach my goal in life...to touch the heads and the hearts of those with whom I come in contact. We are all in this world to make a difference, and these talents are my very own personal difference.



Editor's Note

Third place and honorable mention winners will be published in the Fall 1994 edition of "Bits-N-Pieces." They include the following:

Poetry

David Carner - Brookhaven High, "Readjusting," Third Place; Amy Smith - Brookhaven Academy, "Some Nights," Honorable Mention; Kristy Clopton - Wesson Attendance Center, "He Remembers," Honorable Mention; Jessica Renee Graham - Wesson Attendance Center, "Sunshine-Moonshine," Honorable Mention

Literary Essay

Christina Pell - Brookhaven Academy, "Perception of a White Ghetto," Third Place

General Essay

Julie Ann Grisson - Brookhaven High, "The Decline of Moral Values in our Nation," Third Place; Susan Whittington - Copiah Academy, "Miracles," Honorable Mention

Short Story

Nell Britt - Wesson Attendance Center, "Randall Rabbit," Third Place



